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BY *Keddie* *Henrietta*
SARAH TYTLER

AUTHOR OF

"NOBLESSE OBLIGE," "LADY BELL," ETC.

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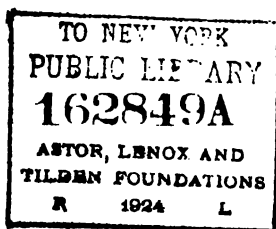
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CHAPTER I

HARRY NEWTON'S EARLY DAYS.

NOT his earliest days, not his childhood and first youth in Australia, but his life when he came to England. He was the only child of a rich squatter and he was sent to the mother country, to receive a University education and be made a gentleman. Newton *père* was the younger son of younger sons several times removed from the main line of his race—squires in Mountshire—it was understood he had some drops of good blood in his veins. Certainly he had the ambition to have his son so educated, that he might do honour to an Australian fortune, whether spent in Sydney or Melbourne or London or Paris.

Young Harry had no objection in the world to being made a gentleman. He did not display the reluctance some unsophisticated youths betray to the refining process, which perhaps was a small proof that he was a ready-made gentleman,

who had it in him to mount and assert his right to the highest step in the social ladder. But neither was this true of Harry, who, from first to last, had little self-assertion and was innocently and comfortably satisfied with a claim common to humanity. He neither looked up nor looked down; while he had no pretensions to be a full-fledged philanthropist, demagogue, or missionary, he had an innate, ineradicable sense of the universal brotherhood of man, and an unconscious instinct to be all things to all men. He was choke-full of sympathy for everybody with whom he came in contact and he had no self-consciousness to hinder its expression.

He was a handsome child and a fine looking boy and lad. The open-air life, he had lived, had lent an ease and freedom to his movements—which the habitual slouch of the born Colonist, more accustomed to riding than to walking, from his babyhood—had not affected. He was thoroughly rustic while he was nearly absolutely free from vulgarity.

Harry did not arrive in England in a state of nature, where education was concerned. His father's dreams for him had included such a preparation for keeping University terms, as the honest efforts of a stranded but not incapable University-man could effect. Harry was not at

all intellectual in the ordinary sense, or bookish in any sense, but he was at least tolerably familiar with the A B C of learning. He was not in this respect behind the ruck of lads, who come to the Universities from private tutors, instead of from public schools.

After the first wrench from home and his father—his mother had died in Harry's infancy—he enjoyed England and Oxford immensely. No doubt he felt sundry restrictions in not knowing himself or his father—which was much the same thing—monarch of all he surveyed—not on Sydney Harbour, but at Red Rock Falls, the Newton's station, where there was any amount of square miles of the Bush to roam in at will. But there were compensating advantages, and Harry had the adaptability of a woman in availing himself of them. He was possessed of a remarkable faculty of enjoyment, which served him from first to last; only crushing blows could destroy or even sensibly qualify it.

A contented, cheery creature was Harry, with a passion for nature and for all nature's possessions, especially in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, which was almost like an additional sense, an affinity and mutual understanding peculiar to himself and them, between him and every plant that grew and animal that breathed. He

had a kind of mother wit, which expressed itself chiefly in kindly pleasantries, and a command of drolly imagined, grotesque comparisons and contrasts. It was a humour, as superficial and ineffective for serious results, as summer-lightning. Possibly for that very reason it recommended itself hugely to the duller, heavier witted; tickled them as with a straw and convulsed them with ready, jovial laughter.

"The best of company" young Newton was voted, when he was a freshman. He was highly popular, except in one light, with his gay companions. He was flush of money and free with it. He was their man, for all fun and frolic, though he could never be brought to have the devotion to cricket, (the great Australian team was not an institution of his day), foot-ball—not even to boating, so far as it was boat-racing—which he showed always for long walks—after he had taught himself to walk—for rides and rows in pursuit of some fish of the water, or fowl of the air, or plant of half wild common or marshland, which had taken his fancy. He might have stood for "the scholar-gipsy" with the important elements of scholarship and love of solitude left out.

Harry had his popularity also with dons and professors, as well as with undergraduates. There was nothing undisciplined or indocile about him.

He was loyal to ordained authority, to the innermost fibre of his being. He was the most obliging, unexacting fellow that ever lived, chary of giving trouble himself, unstinted in taking trouble for others. He was modestly and agreeably at his ease by that happy, half dignified, half obtuse complacency of his, at the table of his dean as at that of the head of his college, when they deigned to honour the undergraduate whom all men liked, as he was, alas! at the shady board of some other undergraduate upon whom the world was turning its back.

Doubtless the fact, that he was exceptionally handsome, contributed to Harry Newton's popularity at this date. His figure was still spare and loosely jointed, when he was little over twenty, but it was impressive from his height and breadth of shoulder, and barring the slouch, which might have passed for "the student's bend", he carried it well, with the simple confidence of his character and antecedents. As for his face, it was very nearly perfect. It was one of those faces, which in its clear fine cutting, straight nose, delicately curved lips, softly rather than strongly rounded chin, one is apt to compare to a classic face, seen in an old cameo. In addition he had acquired an English freshness and purity of complexion. An eminent prelate lately deceased, was so favoured

in this respect, during his college days, that he won from his contemporaries the sobriquet of "the peach." Harry Newton earned another title. In some lights, his face bore a likeness to that of the man in the world whom he least resembled in character—the great Napoleon—Harry's associates in the exercise of undergraduate wit, taking lively count of the points of difference, no less than of similarity, called him "Big Nap."

In Harry's second year a grave obstacle to his worldly success became plainly discernible. He was not an individual addicted to such indoor games of chance as "Nap" or games of skill like billiards. It was not from a propensity to illicit betting, or undue ratting, or fox hunting, it was not from being "gated" and fined an unreasonable number of times, or from never opening a book or attending a lecture or passing an exam, that Harry Newton gradually grew to be regarded in a dubious and half-disgraced light, by his fellows and his official superiors. It was certainly not from anything worse, than might have been included in an excessive love of amusement and a lack of brilliant parts. His rectitude was never questioned. His standard of morality was at least as high as that of his neighbours, though it was not of the loftiest order, for the reason that he had the same difficulty, approaching to incapacity,

in distinguishing shades in morals, that he had in recognising grades in society. In either case his inveterate humility and his indulgent *bonhomie* disqualified him for right judgment.

Harry's stumbling block, his rock of offence, was that he would not or could not see, where rank and privilege ended and plebeianism stepped in. He would not or could not fathom the gulf between Town and Gown. He was happy and at his ease with Gown, he was equally happy and at his ease with Town. He really could not comprehend the stern prohibition against such startling elasticity of principle and temperament. What could be done with a fellow, who in this *fin du siècle* would as lief pray with Kit Smart as with anybody? Nay, what was a hundred times worse than praying, which after all we are permitted to do in any company, Harry would as lief dine, tea and sup, walk arm in arm and shake hands affectionately with Kit Smart's equivalent, as with his vice-chancellor. Actually "Nap" would do his best to sing at a college concert the one night, and the next would exert himself to sing still better at some beastly tradespeople's affair in the Town Hall. He would put in an appearance at a Bampton lecture at St. Mary's in the morning, and in the evening be detected without a blush of shame, figuring as a unit in "a horrid

low dissenting meeting-house." He would play tennis with *la Crème de la Crème* of Oxford girls in the jealously guarded sanctuary of a garden belonging to the Head of a House; and he would leave his companions, without compunction and with only the apology of another engagement, to go and hunt for water-lilies with a bouncing, boisterous troop of town girls, who were simply nowhere in the matter of "form." He had been seen, (tell it not in Gath!) in the Town Barge, instead of his College Barge, watching the "Eights" rowing for dear honour; he had been seen standing unabashed on the deck of an ordinary steam launch, instead of a private house-boat, going with a set of obnoxious shop-people—utterly obnoxious out of their shops, where, to be sure, they were necessary enough—to witness the Henley Regatta.

The humours of well-to-do citizens were apparently as interesting to Harry Newton, as was the Attic talk of University Society. Yet he was no more a social reformer or a political radical, than the most conservative of dons could be proved guilty of such wild socialism. Harry was a radical because he did not see the line which divided gentle from simple, and loved them both as alike his friends and neighbours.

Without question the young man's Colonial

extraction had something to do with his defective intuitions—rather than views. When he was at “home” as he still called Australia, not near any large town but up at Red Rock Falls, out in the bush he had fraternised with everybody as his father had done before him, station keepers, diggers, stock-drivers, shepherds, had been among his chums. Thus it went without saying, if the keeper of a store had ranked as his father’s oldest and most intimate friend and of course as Harry’s friend also, out in the Colony, there would be neither sense nor reason, nor for that matter truth in his declining the acquaintance of those worshipful shop-keepers in Oxford, who were ready to aspire to the distinction—a poor distinction.

There were critics who said that Harry Newton’s Colonial experience, in place of being an excuse, should have been a warning to him. He should have shrunk all the more sensitively from anything resembling the pit, from which he was drawn and the hole, whence he was dug. “No, no”, these critics insisted, it was simply that he had a taste for low life. It was a great pity, of course, for he was a nice fellow otherwise, and was not in himself objectionable in his originality, but the fact could not be contradicted.

There was this much to be said in agreement with the last opinion, Harry was eccentric and his

eccentricity proceeded from what is commonly called "a want" in the man. From some denseness of understanding or blurredness of perception or thick-skinned, easy minded indifference short of individual coarseness, Harry Newton did not know the right hand from the left where the finer shades of manners and morals were in question. He was worthy, oh very worthy in most respects, and in these not the least deserving of consideration. He was honest and manly, just and generous, but he was destitute in a general sense of fastidiousness with regard to the company he kept and the ways of his companions. He was too easily pleased, too tolerant of his neighbours' shortcomings, even when they greatly exceeded his own, too intolerant with a good humoured obstinacy, of any nicety of judgment and exclusiveness of behaviour towards his fellows whose code differed from his.

CHAPTER II.

ANNIHILATED AND RESUSCITATED WITH A NEW ENVIRONMENT.

HARRY NEWTON was still at Oxford keeping his third year's terms. He was no longer hovering between Gown and Town, for such unbecoming vacillation is not to be borne in the most rigidly select of university centres. He had shared the fate of those who sit between stools, he had come to the ground. His popularity with dons and undergraduates was, with a few exceptions, a thing of the past. He had not fared much better with the wealthier tradespeople, who built fine houses on the outskirts and inhabited them, carefully surrounding themselves with all which contributed to the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. If they still kept their sons behind the hereditary counter, because there was no place to speak of for them in college-halls, they sent their daughters to France and Germany

to acquire all the modern accomplishments to be had for money and enterprise. To tell the truth, Harry had no more discrimination here than elsewhere. He was prepared to join forces and be hail-fellow-well-met with the man who still lived above his shop, as well as with the man who had retired to a villa, and if not satisfied with a villa had aimed at a country house. Naturally the man, who dwelt in the villa or the country house and was tabooed even by unattached tutors, was disgusted with Harry's laxity.

Harry Newton was happy in spite of his censors whether of Gown or of Town. He had an innocent vanity of his own, but it was not of the craving, exacting kind which demands unmixed appreciation. For a man bred in the wilds he had still companions enough and to spare. In spite of his geniality he had—born of his antecedents and peculiarities—a certain tendency to isolation. He had after all some taste for lonely rambles, riding and rowing, where he was excellent society for himself, apart from an outer circle of friends, animate and inanimate, among thrushes and nightingales, tom-tits and king-fishers, sheep and oxen, weasels and water-rats, fritillaries and flowering rushes, wild roses and honeysuckle, moon-daisies and grass of Parnassus. For close cronies, he had his bay mare, "Aunt Sally," and his

fox-terrier "Adam." The last was never absent from his master's heels out of quad.

Harry's scout, alas! helped himself to his master's goods on all hands and so was not raised in the scale of humanity by that master's righteousness, but the one culprit loved the other culprit dearly. If Harry had stayed up long enough to go into lodgings, his landlady would probably have done the same in all respects.

Many a child, in houses where Harry visited, and many a child, belonging to houses the thresholds of which his feet never crossed, many a shop-boy and railway porter felt Harry's charm and fell under his spell. And Harry himself was as happy as the day was long, taking his work easily, yet not without the prospect of lumbering along and getting his degree in time, taking his pleasures easily so as to taste them to the full and not exhaust them.

Then the crash in Australia came; a tremendous drought wrought such devastation among flocks and herds, as might have matched one of the calamities which overwhelmed the patriarch Job. But natural causes did not work all the mischief with the elder Newton's property, any more than with Job's possessions, a rascally stock-keeper, who had charge of the stock on a tract of land, as extensive as a moderate-sized

German principality, contrived to embezzle the proceeds and make off with them. Mr. Newton had rashly embarked in mining speculations of which he knew little or nothing, the failure of which meant ruin writ large to the share-holders. To complete the calamity the chief sufferer, already a man up in years, was stricken down by his reverses and died after a short illness.

Harry heard it all in bewilderment and sorrow but not in revolt. His unassumingness and unselfishness had their natural complement of reverence. If before these evils befell him, he had been suddenly told that he was to die forthwith, he would have been startled and more or less shocked, but presently he would have taken refuge in a resignation half manly, half meek. Thus he pulled himself together on this occasion and prepared to face the worst. He was young and strong, he had received a liberal education, though he had to own ruefully that he had not been able to make the most of it. But if everything else failed, he supposed his hands could keep his head, quite as well as another man's hands could do him the same service. Harry was no worse off, not even in the pain of the loss, which left him without a relation in the world, than were hundreds and thousands of his fellow-creatures—as good as he, Harry hastened to add.

To do human nature justice, Harry Newton was not left alone, to cope with misfortune. His tutor and dean and several more of his college authorities, together with half a score of men who were his contemporaries, came forward at the sharpest pinch to do what they could for him. A county lady of mature years, residing at some distance, journeyed expressly to Oxford to do what she might on his behalf.

Lady Gosforth's interest in Harry Newton was not to be lightly set aside. Not so long before, she had had a son, an only child like Harry, who was in the same college, with rooms on the same stair. There were other bonds of union between the lads than propinquity and Harry's overflowing good fellowship. Poor Tom Gosforth was frequently under a cloud. He had a perfect genius for getting into trouble, a good deal more reprehensible than Harry's social escapades, and yet not so very heinous or irretrievable for a harum scarum boy of nineteen. Harry at his own risk had stood by Tom and pulled him through more than one of his scrapes. When Nemesis came at last, in the shape of a coach accident in which Tom Gosforth received a fatal injury, Harry never left his friend till the afflicted mother came on the scene. Towards her he was so tender-hearted, considerate, unfailing in his kindness that she

could only say, choking down a sob, when the burden of her grief was heaviest, that he had been like a son to her.

But though Lady Gosforth was a woman of some force of character and considerable energy, and though she had all the will in the world to be of use to Harry, it was after all one of his decried friends belonging to the Town party, who procured a berth for him, which he could fill at once, which would furnish him with bread and cheese when all the money to his account had been spent in paying his bills.

This friend in need was a Mr. Bates, a respectable linen-draper in the High Street. Harry and he had managed to get acquainted in Harry's prosperous days and the elder man had extended to the younger a hospitality, which the lad accepted with unconscious intrepidity. Mr. Bates was a good old fellow, as good as another; what was Harry's knowledge of the dead languages or his delight in them, that he should throw stones at old Bates because he could not decline or construe the simplest passage in the classics? Why should Harry refuse to forgive Mr. Bates, because his h's were not always to the front and with him r invariably stood for a? Harry wished the fault-finders could hear old Levett the store-keeper at home speak, with his inextricable confusion in

the matter of singular and plural. Yet Levett was not only a man of substance with really a fine place near the Falls; he was held in general esteem, and his notions of the varieties produced by change of locality on bird and beast no less than on plant, were more to be depended upon than the notions of any other man in that part of the Colony.

Mr. Bates returned Harry's liking with interest, and was proud of his friendship, with the inalienable respect of the Oxford tradesman for the College gentleman. The distrust and dislike bred of many centuries of strife have failed to extinguish the respect. The distrust and dislike could hardly extend to Harry Newton, nobody could know him and bear a grudge against him, though it was perfectly possible to undervalue and despise him.

Mr. Bates happened to have a son, who unlike Harry, had social aspirations. To do him justice, he was not without higher motives, but even without them, he would have preferred to starve (metaphorically) as a curate rather than to grow rich as a shop-keeper. Harry had encountered the embryo curate in the College classrooms which are not absolutely closed to such as he. Harry had further come across young Bates in his (Harry's) fishing expeditions and

botanical and ornithological rambles. With his usual disregard of consequences, he had struck up a warm friendship with the other youngster, though the two had little in common, beyond age and a slight similarity in a few pursuits.

The elder Bates had an old acquaintance, who was in a fair position as a lawyer, in the thriving town of Foxchester. This professional man, named Coxe, had a vacancy for a clerk in his office, and on Mr. Bates' recommendation was willing to try Harry, pay him as much as he was worth, and give him the necessary clerkly training.

Harry closed thankfully with the offer at once, and on second thoughts none of his friends could regret his determination.

Even Lady Gosforth soon saw that not much more could have been done for a young fellow, who gravitated unmistakably to the lower middle class. He would probably not have consented to take orders, and if he had, his pulpit eloquence would have been as doubtful as his tact and discretion in a parish. Besides, where was he to get a parish in these days of much competition? How was he to be supported—he, who had been accustomed to wealth in some form—while he was qualifying himself for the Church, without grievous injury to his self-respect and independence? A commission in the Army? He must

have been prepared for that also. He would have found more difficulty in living on his officer's pay than on his clerk's salary. He would have made ducks and drakes of military etiquette. Something in the diplomatic line? No, Lady Gosforth was forced to laugh when she thought of simple-minded, one-idea'd Harry in the character of a diplomat. A land-agent? The status was not much better than that of a country lawyer, to which Harry—though, at present, about as destitute of law as of diplomacy—might hope to rise. Harry, in spite of his rural tastes, knew nothing practically of land and agriculture apart from bush-farming. He had no acquaintance with accounts, with the exception of those which had to do with his personal expenses; these had not been hard to master, when money was plentiful and a fellow was not a spendthrift. He might have gone out as a Colonist to Australia, Southern Africa or America, but as he had not learnt to accept alms, and seemed to have no fancy for acquiring the accomplishment, he must have gone out penniless. Here, Harry's previous Colonial experiences stepped in, and told him that, at this date, his chances of success, as a penniless man who was not a skilled workman, were, on the whole, better in England than in Australia.

Therefore, Harry agreed to Mr. Bates' proposal

and was presently settled as a clerk in Foxchester, with his dog "Adam" as the sole remnant of his flush of fortune and his University career.

Knowing Harry Newton to be what he was, it need not have surprised anyone to find how rapidly he became acclimatized in Foxchester. The town, which had risen upon carpet weaving, and was largely a manufacturing town, had no special attraction for him. Indeed, he liked sitting all day in an office considerably less than attending lectures and attempting to burn the midnight oil over ancient classics and philosophies. But Harry was a philosopher in his own person and he was also an honest young fellow, who put his shoulder to the wheel as well as he could, when it was required of him. If he had been landed and left on a desert island, he would have found something to occupy his faculties and awaken his curiosity and sympathy. Perhaps it would have been easier on a desert island than in a bustling, brand-new, self-engrossed manufacturing town, but it was possible in both cases. He despised no son of Adam—not of Adam his beloved fox-terrier, but Adam the universal progenitor. Accordingly he was soon on excellent terms with his fellow-clerks—to whom he gave himself no airs; (the idea of Harry Newton giving himself airs!)—in whom he discovered, in the shortest

space of time, any amount of admirable qualities, counterbalancing what was lacking in the clerks' minds and manners. When Harry found a man utterly repellant, which was a rare occurrence, he simply left him to himself and forgot all about him. There were so many people in the world, who were friendly and likeable, that it was not worth while to trouble himself with seeking to solve the problem of the few, who were hostile and objectionable.

Harry was soon happy amidst his totally different surroundings in Foxchester. The thing, which tried him most and inspired him with the liveliest regret, was that he no longer had money wherewith to scatter debateable sunshine around him. He could minimize his own wants without any great personal discomfort, but not to retain the power of supplying the real or fancied wants of others, and of dispensing gratification to them, was truly a sensible mortification and genuine pain to him.

Time passed without Harry Newton accomplishing any marvel of legal progress, but in the most humdrum commonplace manner grew worth more to Mr. Coxe than when Harry first entered the office in Foxchester. In course of years he rose several steps, by dint of seniority in age and superiority in culture, in union with general steadiness and trustworthiness.

There he stopped short and was not likely to go any farther, but his easy-going mild-flavoured ambition was well enough satisfied. As senior and confidential clerk to Mr. Richard Coxe, Harry's income—counted, not by the fast receding past, but by recent experience—appeared sufficient for the reasonable requirements of one person. Nay, he grew to think it sufficient for more than one, when his annual visits to a home over which a woman presided, gradually impressed, even on his contented nature, a sense of his loneliness and led him to covet the domestic tie, for which he, more than most men, was eminently cut out. For Harry Newton was made to be a good, happy husband and father. With all his ready-made patience and submission to the decrees of Providence, Harry had shrunk a little from going back to Oxford in his new *rôle*, just as he had shrunk from returning to Australia under totally different auspices from those under which he had quitted it, as the son of one of the most prosperous men on this side of the Great Continent lying in the lap of the Pacific. But Harry had kept up his friendly relations with the Bates', these being farther cemented by his gratitude for the timely intervention of Mr. Bates, at a critical period in the undergraduate's history.

The younger Bates, with whom Harry had

struck up an intimacy, had blossomed into the Reverend John and held a curacy in Somersetshire, where his sister Lucy was at the head of his modest establishment. Harry Newton had spent his annual fortnight's holidays in Somersetshire more than once, before the Reverend John took the important step of entering the holy state of matrimony with one of his parishioners, a lady who had a little private means. This emboldened his friend to follow his example, though the cases were not parallel.

For Miss Lucy Bates was on the eve of being cut adrift, as it were, and under the necessity of returning to the paternal roof, under which dwelt other daughters of the Bates' and she might by preference consent to share Harry's far from magnificent fortunes. As it happened, she saw them through the glamour through which all the Bates' household had originally beheld Harry Newton and everything connected with him. He had been somewhat of the young prince and hero to them; his social downfall had not altogether extinguished this distinction, while it imparted to it a romantic strain. The Reverend John had never been able to convince his sisters, especially Lucy, that Harry Newton was only a so-so scholar, a young man whose abilities were of the most ordinary description, who was rather

thick-headed in fact, though he was a pleasant, amusing enough talker in his own light discursive way. He was a nice fellow, of course, a very nice fellow, but it was not in him to hold his own, far less to set the Thames on fire.

Lucy Bates did not believe her brother on this subject; she was not convinced that Harry would never, by his unaided exertions, mount to a higher seat than that he had descended to, the office-stool of a lawyer's clerk.

It might not have made any great difference though she had been possessed of clearer sight, for she loved Harry, and she was warm-hearted and loyal enough to stand by lover and husband for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse. Anyhow, she married Harry with womanly pride and gladness and began house-keeping with him in a small house in Paradise Row, an economical suburb of Foxchester.

Thus Harry Newton's destiny was settled. Those of his old College companions, who heard of his marriage, felt there was no way left for them, save that of dropping him entirely.

Lady Gosforth was one of the few people who defended him; she said, she did not see how, with his nature, in his circumstances, he could have done otherwise, and she was not sure that he could have done better. She sent his wife a

silver tea-set, as a wedding present. Her ladyship kept up an intermittent correspondence with Harry and was never in the neighbourhood of Foxchester without going to see him.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE IN PARADISE ROW. NANNY AND NELL NEWTON.

IT was more than a quarter of a century since Harry Newton had ended his career at Oxford and it was twenty-one years since he had married Lucy Bates. She had died in the interval—not of cares and worries and narrow means, but of the seeds of consumption, which had lain for a time dormant in her constitution and been developed in the course of years. The same thing had happened with each of her sisters, not one of the Bates' girls had lived to reach middle age, though their brothers had successfully weathered the hereditary flaw. At the time of his wife's death, Harry had not shown himself more disconsolate than most widowers, on the contrary: he had struggled from the first, with sorrowful courage, to make the best of what was left to him, and to live out in manful fashion the

life which had been shattered. But he had also shown how he had valued the wife he had lost, by remaining tenderly faithful to her. She had born him two daughters, who were his chief earthly concern—as he was theirs. He was still no more than head clerk to his first master, whose firm, of which Mr. Coxe had been sole representative to begin with, had progressed into that of Richard Coxe and Son. Harry still lived in the eight-roomed house in Paradise Row, to which he had taken his young wife, his gentle, enthusiastic, loving Lucy, as a bride. He would not have willingly left it for her sake, as it was, and though his youthful spareness had passed into portliness, Number 7 still afforded ample accommodation for Harry, his pair of daughters, when they were at home, and the full blown maid-servant and half grown girl, who formed their staff of domestics. Happily for Harry, his dwelling house had a large garden attached to it, ground being still in not too great request at Foxchester, to deprive the natives of the amenities of gardens larger than pocket handkerchiefs—figuratively speaking. In that flourishing back settlement of his, the master of Number 7 spent the greater part of his leisure, from March to September. He had grown an eager, absorbed gardener, whose roses and cauliflowers meant much more

to him than was meant by his tables and chairs, his cheap cigars, even the timely replacing of his shabby overcoat. For his garden, he had renounced such *dolce far niente* as he had retained from his Oxford days. In connection with his garden he even waxed arrogant and exacting. The greatest rage, in which Harry Newton had ever been seen at Foxchester, was when his contributions to the local flower-show did not receive the attention, to which he considered they were entitled. To see Harry—as well bathed and brushed as ever—starting in the only tram-car of which Foxchester could boast, that at half past nine o'clock every morning ground its way past Paradise Row into the town and as far as Church Street, in which Richard Coxe and Son's offices were situated, was to see a respectable middle-class gentleman, who often looked as radiant as the fine specimen of "La France" or "Devoniensis", which he carried proudly in his button-hole.

Anastasia or Nanny, and Nell Newton, Harry's daughters were girls of twenty and nineteen, the light of his eyes and the joy of his heart. There was very little alloy to the light and joy, for, being the man Harry was, the circumstance that it was the next thing to impossible that he could ever succeed in making a provision for his girls' future, troubled him but little. So far he had

done his best for them, but, with all the will to do his utmost, it had been at the instigation of Lady Gosforth that that best had taken the practical shape it assumed. On one of her ladyship's visits, while the girls were still scarcely in their teens, and were running a little wild, as they began to outgrow the advantages of the old-fashioned ladies' school in which they had hitherto been pupils, she had said, with the privilege of old friendship, "Harry, you must see to these girls. Every time, I see them, I find them growing bigger, or at least older. They will soon be beyond teaching. If they are to depend ultimately on their own exertions, you must furnish them with available tools, in the shape of as suitable an education as you can procure for them. What do you say to sending them to Germany? They can learn excellent music and one foreign language in perfection there. I know of a good school—not at all costly, as English Schools go—and I can lend you a little money for the purpose, if you require it."

Harry did not require it. He and his wife had been able to live within their income. His simple, inexpensive habits had not changed, and very soon Nanny had begun to show a capacity for managing his means and securing his comfort. Besides, their grandfather Bates had on his

deathbed bequeathed to the girls a few hundreds, a portion of which could not be better bestowed than in furnishing them, with what Lady Gosforth regarded as available tools for the business of life.

It was a great wrench for Harry to part with the two mites—mites to him, however long-legged or prematurely wise they might be beginning to appear to the rest of the world. He had always been brave as well as patient, so he raised the companion ladder, let go the connecting rope and sent his daughters afloat on strange waters consenting to be parted from them for years, with the exception of the hilarious interludes of their summer holidays. Now, they had finished their schooling and had come home, for the present at least. Lady Gosforth had announced the first time she had the opportunity of putting them through their performances that she thought they did credit to their Dresden school.

It was not their Dresden school, as Harry reminded himself with secret elation, which had made the girls two beauties. He himself had been eminently handsome at every period of his life down to his present stage of bountiful middle age, in which his fine features were neither pinched, nor coarsened, simply filled out in their classic outlines, and his dark hair was just frosted with

silver. His wife, Lucy, had been very pretty in a fresh, soft and what may be supposed unaristocratic style. Nell was like her on a larger scale, with the air and port of a young Madonna, which is something quite distinct from a young Juno. Nell was brown-eyed, and brown eye-lashed, softly rosy and dimpled, with an open forehead which no wavy down of fringe could rob of its candour, a white pillar of a throat and a figure still retaining its maidenly slenderness, in spite of the signs of the full curves and rounding outlines of greater maturity.

Nanny resembled her father in face, she was darker and paler than Nell. Her clear yet delicately cut profile gave the same delusive impression of austere rigidity and inflexibility in repose, which had helped to win for Harry, the inappropriate nickname derived from the formidable "little corporal." The comparison was not so wide of the mark where Nanny was concerned, not only was she a little woman, there were lights in her gray eyes, curves of her lips and lines about her chin which were lacking in her father's face. Handsome as it was and always would be, it had a lurking setness rather than heaviness, which showed more and more, Nanny was far from having her father's imperturbability; she would rise in defence of him and Nell, if Nanny fancied

them slighted or outraged, with a truly imperial wrath. While she was inches less in stature than her younger sister and was moulded with a dainty slightness, which demanded all Nanny's innate dignity to render it impressive, yet hers was a striking personality. People might call her "Little Miss Newton" if they chose—the son and daughters of Mr. Coxe, her father's employer, always did so—but if she entered a room it was difficult, for ordinary people, not to feel small beside her, she was at once, without any effort or consciousness on her part, the central figure in it. She had a passion for justice—curious in a young and happy woman—which, almost outran the pitying tenderness of a strong, sound nature; she had a corresponding scorn, hard to repress, for all that was unfair, false and mean. Her moral fibre included those keen, often torturing perceptions and intuitions of what was abstractly right and wrong, noble and ignoble, generous and base in small details and in far extending circles, of which her father's nature was destitute—and seeing this obtuseness, together with what was good and true in him, her love for him was passing the love of ordinary daughters, taking as it did an element of the protecting, sheltering love which she bestowed on Nell.

Now, Harry, if he had any preference where

his girls were concerned, gave it to Nell—the image of her mother—who was by no means without character, but it was a character which, like her mother's, had not been blessed or banned with magnifying glasses, and was capable of a considerable amount of honest, kindly, comfortable self-deception. This obligation on Nanny's part, of caring for her father and sister, had dated from the time of Harry Newton's having been left a widower, a view of the situation which had, from the first, characteristically hulked more largely in Nanny's mind, than the companion consideration of her and Nell's motherlessness.

It is hardly necessary to say, that Nanny was the ruling spirit of the house no less than its nominal mistress. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that hers was a disturbing, stormy spirit. She was healthy in mind and body, with all the possibilities for enjoyment belonging to such an enviable constitution, which, after all, in spite of our physical defects, we can cultivate to a great extent if we will. There was no room for fretting in such a constitution. Nanny's spirit was moved impetuously, vehemently, at times, but it was not moved by trifling contradictions, especially in reference to herself; she was full of interests, and full of strength to cope with these interests.

Judicious and beneficial as Lady Gosforth's advice had been, at a critical epoch in the girls' history, its acceptance had not been without its drawbacks. The Newton girls were a little out of place in Foxchester and at the same time it was their native town, which both of them would have hated to undervalue and hold up to ridicule.

"If there is one habit more horrid than another—I am sure you think so too, Nanny," said Nell's pleasant, well modulated voice, speaking to her sister, as the two girls strolled together up and down the privet-bordered walks of the summer garden, "it is for girls to set themselves up as better than their neighbours—to go from home and come back and sneer at its old-fashioned ways, its provincialism, narrowness and the rest of it, nobody knows that better than I—but," with evident reluctance to go on, "I do not care much for Letty and Milly Coxe and their brother. I remember, when we were little girls, I used to count it an honour to be invited to the Coxes and to think I enjoyed it very much, but I don't enjoy it now. I must say I do not find the Prings nicer, while Kate Coppock is the worst of all."

This was a notable speech from Nell. As a rule, she did not stop short with declining to pick holes in her acquaintances' garments; if she

had the smallest ground to go upon, she was prone to invest them in charming gossamer habiliments, the work of her active fancy, which was liable to end in pain and worry, when she was forced to disrobe her puppets. In place of complaining of her geese as geese, Nell was wont to go on, as long as possible, reckoning them swans.

"I don't suppose any of these people care much for us, Nell, so we're quits," said Nanny, composedly.

"But it would have been so much jollier and better altogether, if they had been more companionable girls," said Nell, with wistful regret.

"I daresay," acknowledged Nanny, rather indifferently. She had not the craving for companionship with young people like herself, experienced by Nell, who was, if not enough for Nanny, at least a great deal to her, in the sense of a friend.

"I have no doubt the Coxes and the Prings and Kate Coppock think the same of us," resumed Nanny.

"Do you think so?" asked Nell, wonderingly, as if a new light had been thrown on the question, "then it must be as much our fault as theirs."

"I don't think it is anybody's fault," said Nanny, dispassionately, "it is simply that we and the other girls are not very congenial."

That was the truth. The Newtons and the other young people in Foxchester were not congenial. Nanny and Nell were exceptionally well educated, Lady Gosforth had not been at fault, in the school she had selected for them. But that was not nearly all. Whether from natural superiority of brains on Nanny's part, or superiority in character on Nell's, or from some lingering flavour of gentler manners about Harry, whether from remote untraceable inheritance, the two Newton girls stood apart from the other Foxchester girls in other respects than in those, which had to do with conventional accomplishments and the higher education of women, while naturally the aliens in the community were regarded with a certain amount of suspicion and distrust.

It is not unusual for many attributes of good breeding, to be represented as confined largely to the higher classes of society, and not found far beyond the confines of Belgravia. In these favoured regions, and in these alone, are to be sought well modulated voices, unstudied grace of attitude, judicious suppression of family traits and family confidences, the *savoir faire*, and the indescribable community of interests and sympathies between people in the same high sphere. There is also, it is alleged, an air or tone, beyond all other airs and tones, as peculiar to the leaders in society

and as significant of them as are their great houses and carriages, diamonds, &c. This air in women is illustrated by the exquisite, irreproachable fit of their gowns, by shoes and gloves which are miracles of elegance, by the prior acquaintance of the initiated with all the changes and caprices of fashion.

One cannot help thinking that there is some special pleading here and a considerable amount of error. The air or tone may be given up with the irreproachably fitting, fashionably designed gowns, the gloves and shoes, without which the slender supple hands and feet would at once wax uncouth and awkward. Poor Marie Antoinette was wont to say that if she had not been a queen she would have been "*insolente*." It may be that, to the unbiassed mind, those turns of the head and the white shoulders, raisings of the eyebrows and droppings of the eyelids, which are so enchanting to those biassed in their favour, are little better than insolence, audacity and superciliousness. Malice and cynicism, which have their irresistible attractions to those who are infected with the maladies, are not, let us hope, the distinguishing traits of the upper classes any more than subserviency or brutality is inseparable from the lower ranks. Well modulated voices, even distinct articulation, where education has prevailed, simple,

natural grace and dignity are to be heard of and seen in every station, just as kind hearts and good faith are not the private possession of either the high or the low. The stamp of an extensive familiarity with certain artificial, frivolous, often selfish modes of living, is not needed for the existence of qualities, which, like beauty itself, are the gifts of God rather than of man.

Without question, the presence of innate and outward refinement is frequently to be detected in stranger quarters than the manufacturing circles of Foxchester. Nature's gentlemen and gentlewomen, in more or less adverse circumstances, are not pure myths. It may or it may not be that the portent points to an inevitable ascent in the social scale. Admittedly it raises a barrier between the recipients of the boon and those, who would otherwise have been their congenial associates.

CHAPTER IV.

NANNY'S AND NELL'S DUTY.

IT must be remembered that Nanny and Nell Newton were in an anomalous position. They were, after all, simply the daughters of an attorney's clerk and no other clerk's daughters in the town were "far and away" so well educated and so well looking, neither were they invested with similar privileges. It puzzled and annoyed the Coxes, Prings and Coppocks to account for this, it looked like an unwarrantable liberty, an abuse of "favours received?" Why should "little Miss Newton" and her sister Nell appear to others, and probably feel to themselves, such superior articles of their kind, without overt arrogance and impertinence on their part? They were only the daughters of Mr. Coxe's head clerk.

True, there were some concessions which were easily accounted for. College educations were not common in Foxchester and though poor

Harry's erudition was limited, it had its appreciable weight. It constituted him a gentleman-clerk, a parallel institution to that of a lady-help. Another source of consideration was still more obvious and had greater influence. Lady Gosforth's constant recognition of the family and interest in them, raised them in the eyes of the British Philistines; though her ladyship had not, as far as was known, invited the grown up girls to visit her on terms of equality.

Nanny and Nell, though they would have been the last to set themselves up in opposition to their townswomen, could not help seeing that they themselves were different. They did not spend their time in house to house gossip, and general meddling and mischief-making like the Coxes. The Newtons were not engrossed with the changes of fashion, with brand new customs, new fads, new certificated polished slang like Ethel and Maude Pring. Nanny and Nell were not addicted to bare-faced, under-bred romping and flirting, like Kate Coppock, nor wholly given up to parish work and subjugation to the clergy of every shade of opinion and practice, like Kate's lame sister Lizzie. Each Newton girl did not so much gauge her neighbours by her own immunity from pettiness and advance in intelligence, as measure them by her sister's attributes. At the same time

Nanny at least saw Nell's faults as well as her graces. Nanny privately, thought Nell was as lovable as she was lovely. This did not keep Nanny from being afraid that Nell was a little foolish, in borrowing, from the treasures of her own soft heart and kindly imagination, fictitious adornments for anybody she took a fancy for, and so being rendered liable, as her mother had been before her, to a succession of disillusion and disappointments.

Nell secretly, held Nanny to be a paragon of wisdom and cleverness and if she were a little sharp-sighted, matter-of-fact and obdurate, it was never to serve her own purposes, never in the way of failing her friends; for was not Nanny the most generous, the most faithful, and, under her seeming hardness, the most tender of women and girls? And was she not a real beauty? not a milkmaid beauty, or a fine lady beauty, but a beauty according to the highest standard?

Both the girls agreed in admiring and being fond of their father, only Nell admired him all in all, and saw not a short-coming in him. Nanny admired what was admirable in him, but with her fondness was mingled the lurking apprehension, the inexpressibly reverent pity of the gifted mother for the good son whom she has every reason to cherish, yet with regard to whom

she is sensible, in her inmost heart, that he has not attained to the highest manhood.

"Aren't father's manners perfect?" Nell would exclaim delightedly, "so far beyond Mr. Coxe's, for instance. *He* kept father standing ever so long, while Mr. Coxe was sitting and dictating business letters the other day. I saw them through the glass door of the inner office, when I was waiting outside to walk home with father. Why, *he* would not suffer a porter, not to say a washer-woman, to stand so long, while he talked at his ease.

"Father would not mind of course. That is the best way of meeting such treatment," answered Nanny, bending her straight brows a little, as she sat at her needlework in the shabby little drawing-room. It had hardly had a stick of furniture added to it, since Harry furnished it at a cheap rate to begin with, but it was kept scrupulously neat and bright. This was not done so much by the introduction of expensive, out of place nick-nacks, as by the unobtrusive but unmistakable evidence of careful use and cultivated taste, in the traces of the occupations and recreations of a pair of well-trained, well-bred, womanly girls. There were one or two good engravings, relics of Harry's College rooms, but not representations of winning horses, prize

dogs, or ballet girls. There were a few bits of inexpensive German wood-work and Meissen porcelain. There was an abundance of flowers from Harry's garden. The books were not confined to circulating-library novels, though one of these was there also. There were Nanny's easel, and Nell's pile of music besides the cottage piano, which had been Lady Gosforth's gift to the girls in anticipation of their first holidays; because their mother's piano was too far gone to serve any other use, than that of an extra table in the dining-room.

"Of course," Nell continued the conversation, "father understands. And don't you like to hear him talking to his old friend Lady Gosforth? He is so thoroughly himself—exactly as she is herself. There is not a word or a look to imply, that he is constantly remembering that he is 'a poor white-headed old fogey of a clerk' as he called himself laughing at me the other day, and that she is Lady Gosforth of Gosford Manor. They are just a man and woman who knew each other long ago, before we were born, and liked and respected each other both then and now, were ready to help each other whenever they could."

"What would you have? Father can always be trusted to behave like the gentleman he is,"

replied Nanny with pleasant dryness of humour. As she spoke she threw back her head with a smile, which betrayed the only fault in her beautiful mouth. It might have been amended in time, if she had been born a princess or even a dweller in Belgravia, as it was the small white teeth were irregular. The fault was lost on Nell, who, if she had been challenged with it, would have stood up for it, and vowed it was an additional beauty, simply because the teeth were Nanny's teeth. In spite of such perversity the Newtons were not a mutual admiration society in the sense of open or conscious flattery. Nell was sincere in her infatuation, which she kept to herself for the most part, since she had a strong inkling that its open expression would affront Nanny, who would scout it unmercifully. Nanny was frequently calling Nell to order and finding fault with her affectionately, but quite in earnest. For Nell in spite of her super-excellent schooling was inclined to be careless, unmethodical, and unpunctual. Nanny had often to quote for Nell's benefit Sir Walter Scott's opinion—an unusually severe one for him—that people, in the rank of life of his amanuenses, never rightly understood the value of time. Nell would waste her own and other people's time, and never get on in the world, if these foibles became inveterate. Nanny was not

naturally more of a martinet than Nell was, but then Nanny fully realized the consequences of such failures. In her small heroic way, open to most of us, she strove to correct and overcome the tendency in her own person.

At this moment she was starting a subject, which was decidedly unpalatable to Nell, and proceeding to deal with it in the most straightforward, unmincing style. "Don't you think, Nell," said Nanny, "while father owns to being 'a poor white-headed old fogey of a clerk' it is high time for two big—no, big is a misnomer in my case—two full grown women to be bestirring themselves? Is it not a shame for us, to live off his salary instead of doing something to supplement it?"

Nell looked taken aback, but she did not contradict Nanny.

"I'll tell you what I should like for father," went on Nanny persuasively, "I should like him to have a gardener's lad to help him, now that he feels the spring work among his vegetables and flowers too heavy for him."

"Couldn't we help him?" suggested Nell.

"We might, and we do when he will let us, but he gives us none of the heavy work and never will. And don't you think Nell, when his summer holidays come round, he ought to be able to go down to Somerset to Uncle John's Vicar-

age and fish and 'laze' for a couple of weeks? He would be ever so much the better for it. It would freshen him up immensely. He has not gone from home, for more than two nights, for five years, not since you and I went to Germany to school."

Nell hung her head a little and spoke slowly in answer to Nanny's suggestion. "I suppose father likes to take all the toil and trouble he takes with the garden, else he would not do it; and he says he does not care to go from home in summer time, because of the roses and peas and cauliflowers, nor later on in the year because of the plums and pears and marrows."

"Yes, father *says* so," remarked Nanny meaningly, stitching without intermission at the cover of a sofa cushion of which there was need.

"And he would be so dreadfully dull without us," went on Nell with greater confidence. "He told us, only the other night, what he never allowed at the time, how much he missed us when we were in Dresden. I am sure he would much rather have us at home than a gardener's lad, or than a run down into Somersetshire. You know Uncle John is always busy and pre-occupied, and Aunt Bates is out of health. The boys are either at Oxford, or away with reading parties; and the girls are as much engrossed with the

parish and as unentertaining as Uncle John. Nobody has anything to say except about the Squire and his wife, the Sunday school teachers and the district-visitors. It is all quite right of course, but it is rather tiresome for visitors. It was you yourself, Nanny, who said so, the last time we were there," finished Nell reproachfully.

"I don't deny it," answered Nanny, with a gleam of amusement in her gray eyes, "but do you imagine father is dependent for his entertainment on his host and hostess, or on their sons and daughters, or even on the kind of neighbourhood or of trout-stream he has come to, or on the state of the weather?"

"No," Nell was forced to admit, "father would get along with anybody, and be happy anywhere—even in a prison, like the man who watched his prison flower, still I don't think he really cares to leave Foxchester. Yesterday you were bent on his having a new summer suit, and he laughed and said he would not be made a dandy of, and that the old was better for taking his ease, doing his watering and catching his slugs in."

"He would do both—leave Foxchester and have a new suit to please us," said Nanny quickly.

"And he would miss us awfully," insisted Nell, with a pucker of her smooth forehead and the suspicion of a quiver of her soft lips.

"So much, Nell," said Nanny emphatically "that I could not find it in my heart, to suggest leaving him again to the tender mercies of Marianne the 'Marchioness', though Marianne is a worthy girl and would look after his bodily wants to the best of her ability, as her sister Sally did before her marriage, when we were away. One of us must keep house for father and be at his call, and I think it must be you, though you are the younger."

"Oh, thank you, Nanny" said Nell huskily and stopped short there.

"I must confess, I cannot think of you as house-keeper-in-chief, without a good many qualms. You forgot to order the dinner, on one of the days when I was staying with Uncle Frederick in Oxford last month, yet you succeeded in running up such a bill for the week that I had to put the whole family—father and all—on short commons: a diet of lentil soup, shepherds pie and fried mackerel for the week following, in order to make the accounts square," Nanny shook her head and laughed half in jest, half in earnest.

Nell took no notice of the impeachment, she was not touchy or vain in the matter of her amateur housekeeping. She was a good deal startled and a little frightened by the turn the conversation had taken, though it was not the first time Nanny had led it in this direction.

"And what will you do, Nanny?" she asked, with a shade of nervousness and hesitation.

"I have almost made up my mind," said Nanny composedly, but letting her work fall in her lap in order to give a more respectful air to her conversation with her sister. "There is going to be a girls' High School started in the town, I have heard of it more than once lately. The Coxes were talking about it yesterday. The Committee is appointed and they have chosen an experienced head-mistress. I am thinking of applying for one of the other mistress-ships—either one for French and German, or one for drawing and painting. I believe I could venture to undertake either, and I have my certificates to back me up. If I got the post, there would be one great advantage and comfort, in addition to the salary, which is not to be despised, I could still stay at home. I could come back here every afternoon I mean, though I have been told the High School Mistresses are people of such importance, officially, that they are apt to go on committees of their own in the afternoon, and they have numbers of lessons to arrange, and piles of exercises to correct, so that they are very little good to their belongings when the mistresses are at home." Nanny smiled a little faintly at the consideration. She was clever, but teaching was not her

forte and she was only in her twenty-first year.

Nell's face fell till it looked absolutely doleful. "It is good of you," she faltered, "and brave, yes, brave, I could hardly do it, unless it were forced upon me, I know we were educated for something of the kind, I hear so much of the new careers opening up for women, but when it comes to the pinch, it is always teaching they have to fall back upon, so Lady Gosforth says, but she is of the old school and may be prejudiced. Oh! Nanny, it is so hard to think of having to spend our young days in bare dingy school-rooms with troops of dull and stupid or riotous and rebellious girls; if we do it, we shall not have an hour we can call our own until we are too worn-out to be fit for anything, save resting as if we were old women. We shall not be able to take a walk when the sun is shining. If we have a headache we cannot stop to cure it, we must just grin and bear it."

"Why not?" asked Nanny in youthful severity, leaning back for a moment till her head rested against the window curtains; she did not mind the sunshine, which seized the opportunity of flashing in, lighting up her clearly cut face, and shining into her gray eyes without, however, dazzling them. "It is the discipline of life which we believe in, or profess to believe in."

"But there should be play as well as work," urged Nell.

"Bah!" exclaimed Nanny in rousing derision. "And there is no occasion for you to pile up the horrors. School-rooms need not be bare and dingy. I believe the High School Companies commonly build, what are called "palatial" institutions and furnish them with whatever is requisite according to the newest ideas. All school girls are not dull and stupid, or riotous and rebellious. We need not slander them, it is not so long since we were school girls ourselves, my dear," with these words there was the very slightest most fleeting tremble of other ripe lips than Nell's.

"It is all very well to say that it is honourable to work for one's living," continued Nell ruefully, "of course it is honourable in a sense, more honourable than to beg, or to hang on one's burdened friends, but all the same people look down on the girl, who has to do it, almost as much as if she begged."

"Who looks down on the girl who works?" demanded Nanny sharply.

"Numbers of people, the world at large," said Nell, rather indefinitely.

"And is the world at large—supposing you are right—so wise, high-minded and disinterested that you should bow to its opinion?"

Nell shook a little in her shoes, she was devoted to Nanny, but she had a wholesome fear of her sister's disgust, when she spoke in that tone. "The Coxes and Prings and girls like them think so," she grew less vague in defending her words. "I have heard them speaking so contemptuously of 'broken down hacks of governesses and companions.' Even women who write books or paint pictures, to earn their bread, are not to be compared to people of independent means and abundant leisure, in the world's estimation. The girls we know here," added Nell growing bolder as she spoke, "have only one opinion of the High School Mistresses. They are not so deplorable as the others, but they are more detestable in every way. They are over-bearing, defiant and masculine. Regular 'school Ma'ams' Ethel and Maude Pring call them. Bertie Coxe says they are pedantic blue-stockings and self-sufficient 'Miss Cornelia Blimbers', Mrs. Coxe thinks they are 'professional' which is unladylike and generally unpleasant."

"I don't care," said "little Miss Newton" with supreme disdain, "I thought you were not so fond of the Foxchester girls, nor of Bertie Coxe and his mother, as to adopt obsequiously their mean, out of date standard, and cower under their scorn."

"I have known them all my life," protested Nell, almost tearfully.

“So have I,” declared Nanny undauntedly, “and I have known other and wiser people, I am ready to make allowance for Foxchester’s knowing no better, but I am not going to be affronted by it, especially when I am doing what is right.”

CHAPTER V.

NEWTON-HAYES DROPS FROM THE SKIES.

NEITHER Nanny nor Nell, as it happened, was fated to test the danger they ran of growing into strong-minded women—prone to rule rather than to charm. The very day after that, on which the girls had talked together on the subject, they went, as they had a custom of going, to intercept their father, on his return from his office, at an appointed corner of Church Street, and persuade him to take a walk with them, before he came back like Cincinnatus to his cabbages and his high tea—a refreshment unknown to the Roman patrician. Nanny and Nell had been successful in catching their prey and the three were proceeding, in great harmony, to make a *détour* round by the oldest church in the parish and by what had been the Village Green, before Foxchester took to weaving carpets and rose into a manufacturing town, when they were

stopped by Bertie Coxe. He was the "Son" in the firm, was in fact the lawyer's only grown-up son. He was a young man who had fulfilled his articles, and arrived at the respectable age of six and twenty. He had been hurrying after the group and was out of breath, when he reached them. "How do you do, Miss Newton? How are you, Miss Nell? I beg your pardon, Mr. Newton, will you come back to the office? My father has something he wishes particularly to say to you."

Bertie's manner was perfectly respectful, which was a wonder, since Young England in this case had not improved in manner over Old England. Indeed, if Harry Newton's daughters had taken umbrage at the lordly tone, assumed by the head of the firm to his clerk, they had been still more aggrieved by the free-and-easy dictatorialness indulged in by the junior partner, the "Look sharp, will you, Newton?" "Oh! I say have you not got through those letters yet?"

Sandy-haired, prominent teethed, slap-dash Mr. Bertie was not a favourite with either of the girls, though he had shown himself willing to pay them patronizing attentions. But on this occasion his manner, though manifestly excited, was unexceptionable.

"Bless us! is my watch wrong?" exclaimed Harry taken aback, drawing forth and looking

critically at the guiltless face of his good old watch, a survival of the past.

"I thought it was five minutes past four—as it must have been by the time here, and my time-keeper is not in the habit of playing me tricks—when I left the office, and that the work was pretty well cleared off; I am sorry if I overlooked anything, which your father thinks of consequence, Mr. Bertie. I saw him coming along with a gentleman, whom I don't remember to have seen before, as I was going out. I fancied he was otherwise engaged, else I might have waited for him."

"Not at all," said Bertie hastily, "I mean nothing of the kind you refer to. There has been nothing gone amiss in the day's work. It is a piece of news—unlooked for—at least as far as my father and I are concerned, which he wished to communicate to you."

Bertie Coxe's usually cool, confident manner was still flurried though he was no longer out of breath; his tone retained the odd deferential inflection which it had not taken before, while the speaker looked curiously at his elderly clerk, in a speculative instead of in a masterful fashion.

"Good news?" suggested Harry, with the cheerful carelessness of the man who is down and need fear no fall.

"Certainly; capital, splendid news for those who have to do with it. I wish I had the chance," declared Bertie, with what sounded uncalled for effusiveness. Harry had turned and was preparing to retrace his steps, but he stopped for an instant to say.

"Girls, you need not lose your walk, and don't wait tea for me, if I happen to be detained, I'll come in for supper by and by."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Newton," (Bertie had begged Harry's pardon twice that afternoon, and he had not done it before, since he was a forward little boy, who ran into the office between school hours, with messages from his mother to his father, and if he was not looked after played havoc among the office pens and paper,) "I think the Misses Newton had better accompany you, I believe—well, I am tolerably certain that they have an interest in what you are going to hear, and I should like to be the first to congratulate them as well as you," and Bertie slightly raised his hat with what he intended to be an insinuating bow.

"Bless us!" exclaimed Harry again, staring in a bewildered way at the young man, and then his slow mind leapt to the conclusion that old Coxe was going to raise his—Harry's—salary, though he did not know that his services were worth more than they had been years before—

say, the last time the agreeable operation was performed. It was rather a public way of doing the deed too; but Coxe was doubtless the best judge on both counts, and while Harry had no objection in the world to being patted on the back and told he was worth his weight in gold, neither—he was convinced—had the two beauties, his daughters. They would have marched by his side as resolutely in order to stand by him, had he been going to punishment and disgrace, but of course it was far nicer to have their company, when his employers were about to bestow on him an additional testimony of their esteem and honour.

The girls with their livelier ideas had already anticipated their father in his conclusion. Nell had gone a good deal farther. In her imagination her father—without preliminary study or examination—was about to be received into partnership with the Coxes, who were known to represent the most flourishing lawyers' firm in Foxchester; she was sure that, in the twinkling of an eye, he would be the most popular of the partners and the one in greatest request. Then of course there would be no further need of Nanny's seeking to take a mistress-ship in the High School.

None of the Newtons made any attempt to pump Bertie Coxe, as, perhaps, he expected and

desired, while he was escorting them back to Church Street. Harry was of a quiescent turn of mind, the girls, though lively enough between themselves, were more reserved than sprightly in their bearing to the young men they came across, besides the distance was so short, that there was little time for temptation to assail anybody. In a very few minutes the party were at the office, where Bertie ushered the others through the outer office, which the junior as well as the senior clerks had vacated, into Mr. Coxe's private room. There he was standing on the hearth-rug with the very stranger Harry had seen in Mr. Coxe's company in the street, a quarter of an hour before. Spread out on the desk, before the head of the firm, was a pile of papers which Harry had not noticed, when he was last in the room.

"Glad Bertie has caught you up, Mr. Newton," said old Coxe who was habitually pompous and overbearing. He was pompous still, but, in lieu of his overbearingness, he was as gracious and polite as Bertie had been, while he hailed the clerk; and took in the unusual circumstance that he was attended to the office by his daughters. "Ah! the young ladies too, glad to see them also. Their presence is not *de trop* on this occasion, as the presence of ladies is apt to be

in men's dens, on the contrary it is opportune. Bertie I see you are bringing forward chairs for the Misses Newton, such humble accommodation as a plain place of business can afford they are most welcome to, most welcome if they will excuse its insufficiency. Mr. Newton allow me to introduce you to Mr. Westmacott, solicitor, Atherney;" Mr. Coxe glanced at a card which he had taken up from his desk, and ended with a solemn bow.

The name and profession of the stranger brought no further enlightenment to Harry than he had already gained, by a look in the direction of a somewhat formal and precise looking elderly gentleman. The cut of his coat, the bow of his necktie, especially his spectacled eyes fixed courteously but keenly on Harry Newton, betokened a professional man, with every indication that the profession was one of peace, ostensibly. Ten chances to one the calling was that of a lawyer and not of a doctor, a clergyman or a civil engineer.

Harry bowed blandly, with his simple unaffected dignity though he was utterly mystified. He had never heard the name of Westmacott before. He knew Atherney was a country town in one of the midland counties—Mountshire or Sparshire, but he was unable to conjecture, what either could have to do with any rise in his

salary. Was it possible that this Mr. Westmacott, a lawyer in his own person, had heard wonderful tales of Harry's legal acuteness and trustworthiness? Did he come to negotiate the transfer of the invaluable clerk from Mr. Coxe's service to his own? Harry laughed in his sleeve at the notion and shook his silvered head with a nearly imperceptible movement.

It was Mr. Westmacott's turn to play his part in the drama. "I am highly gratified to have the honour of making your acquaintance, Mr. Newton," he said bowing from a lower angle of the back-bone than Harry had thought it necessary to descend to in his salutation, and speaking with old-fashioned, exaggerated ceremony which was yet perfectly serious.

Harry had once seen the part of Christopher Sly played in a London theatre and he now received the impression, that somehow, he was about to enact the *rôle* of the drunken befooled vagabond.

"Allow me to ask you, sir," Mr. Westmacott was proceeding to enquire in his respectful and judicial voice, "if you have known anything of a recently deceased namesake of yours, Mr. Newton of Newton-Hayes in Mountshire? Are you aware that there was any relationship between you?"

Harry at first said "no", without any reservation, then cudgelling his memory he extracted

from it an isolated fragment of information, "I think I have heard my father speak of Newtons of Newton-Hayes. I believe, he considered we were sprung from the same old stock, far off connections in short."

"Exactly. You never sought to verify your father's opinion?" suggested Mr. Westmacott bringing the tips of his fingers in gentlest proximity, while still looking searchingly at Harry.

"No," replied Harry, without taking back his word this time, "I came from Australia a young fellow bound for a university, and when I left it I had no leisure for such investigations, indeed, I never troubled my head about them. I may say further," Harry went on out of the vein of humour, which was in him, "the Newtons of Newton-Hayes, who had probably much more leisure than I, that is if there were such people, never laid claim to me as a kinsman."

"Will you be surprised to hear that you are supposed—remember, I say supposed not proved, though I have not much doubt in my own mind," proceeded Mr. Westmacott with cautious accuracy, "you are supposed to be the nearest surviving relative of the late Jasper Newton, who died at Mentone in the spring of this year. He died intestate without leaving direct heirs. He married twice but had no children by either wife. He

survived his second wife, who had, of course, an interest in the property. He had younger brothers but the one was in the Navy and perished with the wreck of his ship "The Lord High Admiral" when he was still in his teens, and the other died a bachelor some time before the squire. The three brothers—there were no sisters, were the sons of a man who was an only child. Those lamentable breaks, failures in the line of succession, where our county families are concerned occur more frequently than anybody, who has not investigated the subject, would imagine," remarked Mr. Westmacott *par parenthèse*, with a little measured wave of his hand, as if to set off a general reflection for the benefit of the listeners.

Harry's eyes were opening almost as widely as were those of his daughter Nell, who sat next him. He betrayed some change of colour, but he answered quite calmly and civilly, if a little bluntly:

"May I ask how you know all about the Newtons of Newton-Hayes?"

"Certainly," answered Mr. Westmacott promptly with another and a slighter bow, "I have the honour to be the family lawyer, as my father was before me. Now, permit me to ask—was your father's name 'John Newton' like that of his father? and was he—your grandfather—a yeoman-farmer at Radstock in Huntingdonshire?"

"My father's name was John Newton and I believe my grandfather was a yeoman-farmer either in Bedfordshire or Huntingdonshire."

"In Huntingdonshire," said Mr. Westmacott with an authoritative nod. "Did any members of your father's family emigrate along with him?"

"Yes, his wife, his nephew Miles, and Miles' wife—I can remember the last two, when I was a small chap," said Harry with more animation, "he was nearly as old as my father. I have heard them say, his father was my grandfather's eldest child, while my father was his youngest, in a large family—the members of which nearly all died young, and that there was the difference of a score of years between the brothers."

"Can you tell me what became of your cousin Miles?"

"He and his wife with their two children—I was fond of those kids though they were babies to me, and I was a big boy to them," broke off Harry meditatively, "well, they parted company with us and went off to Adelaide, which was not a very old settlement in those days. You see, neither my father nor my cousin got on very well, during these first few years in the Colony. Miles thought he could do better for himself squatting elsewhere on newer ground. There was no quarrel to speak of, that I ever heard of,

a little dryness and difference that was all, but Miles Newton grew discontented and went off carrying his belongings along with him."

"Did you ever come across him again?—Pardon me, Mr. Newton," broke off the lawyer with elaborate ceremony, "I am speaking in your interest and I have a purpose to serve in putting these questions to you. They are necessary, inevitable in fact. They are not asked merely to gratify idle curiosity, I assure you."

"I should not think they were," said Harry with his easy genial smile, as he began to recover from the shock which had been administered to him. "What interest could anybody have in cross-examining me, about relations of mine whom I have all but forgotten, poor souls, unless it were a matter of business? But, except that it sounds a waste of breath to talk so much of my insignificant self, I have no objection in the world to tell anybody, who cares to hear, all I can recall of my humdrum antecedents. There is nothing to be either proud or ashamed of in them, since we none of us did more than make money and lose it, and we none of us went out at the country's expense. No, neither my father nor I ever came across poor Miles or his family again. I should have known him among a thousand, though I was a slip of a boy when I saw him

last, for he was one of those short-bodied long-legged men who are like nothing so much as a pair of tongs. His mind was not in proportion any more than his body, since he was one of those melancholy grumblers, who have always a laugh and a joke on the other side of their grumbling. There was no hope of our meeting again in this world, after the first news we heard of him, and that news did not reach us till many months had passed. Colonial posts, which were not bringing gold from the diggings, had not attained the clock work punctuality they were bound to reach. The bad news that did not travel fast was, that poor Miles and his little boys had fallen victims to typhoid fever, which had been raging in Adelaide. His wife survived him, and my father heard incidentally—years later, that she had married again and had gone with her second husband to Brisbane.”

“Thank you, Mr. Newton,” said Mr. Westmacott, leaning back against the chimney-piece of the fireless grate, unable, with all the traditional decorum and self-restraint he was bound to assume to the man he was addressing, to hide an air of mingled self-importance and triumph. “Your recollections agree at every point with the information it has been my duty to procure. I may take it upon me to say that I have spared

no pains in certifying it within a reasonable time. Considering the remote dates, and the distant locality, I think nobody will deny me the small credit of having collected and assorted my evidence carefully. Sir, you are, as I have said, the nearest surviving relative of the late Mr. Newton, of Newton-Hayes. Had your cousin Miles been alive, or had he left children, he or they would of course have had the prior claim, as the heirs of your grandfather's elder son; but we have disposed of them," Mr. Westmacott hastened to observe, not in a sanguinary, but in a methodical way, "there will not be the smallest difficulty in proving your claim. I have no hesitation in at once wishing you joy on your succession."

"I am much obliged to you," said Harry with equal urbanity, dashed with a soupçon of levity, "I hope the game is worth the candle. I mean," he went on, unsubdued by Mr. Westmacott's dignified amazement, "that in these bad times for agriculture, Newton-Hayes—you must remember that it has only just emerged from a haze where I am concerned"—he perpetrated the small pun unblushingly—even to looking round for approval of the trivial witticism—"may be a white elephant."

"Sir!" protested the family lawyer a little hot and offended, as he drew up his tall figure, "*we*

have had the management of the property for three generations. The mansion house, park, and preserves are in as good order as can possibly be expected, in a place which has not had a resident landlord for the space of eight years, since Mr. Jasper Newton fancied England did not agree with him and only paid it flying visits in his latter days. The farms and the farm buildings are also in good repair. The tenants, with hardly an exception, are solvent, and the clear rental is five thousand a year."

"I am glad to hear it," said Harry, with no more observable elation than if it had been five hundred, which, to be sure, would have been nearly double his present income. "I make no question that the place and I myself are both greatly indebted to your careful stewardship," again there was a small interchange of bows, for Harry, too, was getting old-fashioned in his politeness.

"To think that stupid old beggar Newton is a full blown squire, of long descent and old acres, with an income of five thousand a year for doing nothing!" Bertie Coxe was saying to himself, with rising indignation, while his father was shaking Harry by the hand, and proclaiming in a blatant voice, fit for the occasion, that he hoped Harry understood they were all one with Mr.

Westmacott in wishing him joy from the bottom of their hearts, though they should be extremely sorry to lose his valuable services.

Nanny and Nell, who had been sitting with parted lips and shining eyes, had to consent to be wished much joy in their turn, and to be assured how enchanted Mrs. Coxe and the rest of the family would be to hear the great news. It seemed to the girls as if they would never get away, never get their father to themselves. Yet, in truth, the arrangements by which—after going home—he was presently to come back to Mr. Coxe's private room, which he hastened to put at the service of the squire elect and his lawyer (who had taken up his quarters at the Royal Arms Hotel), were made with commendable celerity. Any number of interests and any amount of details had to be overtaken, but, for an hour and a half at least, Harry Newton and his daughters could be left to themselves. It was lucky, after all, that Number 7 Paradise Row did not afford suitable accommodation for its master's dispensing hospitality to the family lawyer, and holding consultations with him within its bounds.

CHAPTER VI.

“GOOD-BYE” AND “WELCOME”.

“IS it true, father, can it be true?” Nell pressed him, hanging about him.

“Why did you never tell us about Newton-Hayes and the inheritance which was to be yours?” asked Nanny.

“And yours, my dear, yours and Nell’s,” he said softly, with a dimness coming over his eyes. He recovered himself the next moment to laugh a protest: “How could I tell you, Nanny, when I knew nothing of it myself. I am sure I cannot tell you if it is true, Nell, but I suppose it is. There, it is not a thing to make such a rout about. Let us have tea, I am as hungry as a hawk. What! You cannot swallow a morsel, Nell, nor Nanny either, a pair of little geese! You don’t know what you are going to, though you imagine it is all splendour and sunshine. I, for one, have been very happy in Paradise Row. I don’t

know how I shall bear to turn my back upon it."

Nanny knew, when he said that, he was thinking of her mother, though he hastened to make a feint of meaning something quite different.

"To think," he protested, with comical ruefulness, "that I put in these apricot trees last autumn, and that no tenant is legally entitled to strip the walls he has covered at his own expense, when he makes a change of dwelling. I might also have saved myself the trouble, as it seems, of sowing late peas and planting out giant asters this year."

"Never mind, father," Nell assured him, "I daresay there will be plenty of apricots and peas and asters awaiting us at Newton Hayes."

"Do you think father will give us a season in town, like what is a *sine qua non* in novels?" cried Nell, when the girls were alone together. "Do you think we may be presented to Her Majesty?" she went on, with an eager catch in her breath, "I daresay Lady Gosforth would present us."

"Better not set your heart upon it, dear," said Nanny, trying hard to be sober minded and moderate in her views. "Father detests great towns, and, of course, he has no familiar associations, no club haunts and cronies, such as one can easily imagine an ordinary squire of Newton-Hayes might have had, to

reconcile him to the obligation. I am sure Lady Gosforth will do all she can for us; but she may not think a presentation at court necessary, especially as, though father has turned out to be of good family, dear mother, whom I can just remember kissing and crying over us when she knew she had to leave us, was nobody, only an Oxford tradesman's daughter. I am not acquainted with the rules, but the Lord Chamberlain who has charge of the admissions to drawing-rooms, might say we had no quarterings on one side of the house and object to the deficiency."

"Oh! Nanny, I wish you would not be so strictly sensible and would not sit upon me just when I have got my head out," cried Nell a little petulantly.

"Poor Nell!" said Nanny, in quick comprehension, "I am sorry to damp your expectations. Don't think I do not share them. I should like to kiss the Queen's hand, to see for myself what so royal and good a woman is like, and to be on what may be called curtseying terms with my sovereign—And Oh! Nell, I should like to meet all the distinguished and famous people, who are to be met with in our day, and to hear the lions roar in London. There is presumption for you!"

"I am sure you are as clever as any of them, Nanny, and would meet them on equal ground."

"My dear!" cried Nanny in real or affected horror, "as clever as the Lord Chancellor, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest type of nonconformist, the most renowned authors and painters, the most gallant generals and admirals, the travellers to the utmost ends of the earth—what nonsense you must be talking, Nell, unless I have been hiding my head under a bushel."

"The Newtons have been a lucky family. 'Little Miss Newton' will be able to assert herself at last," remarked the Coxes and the Prings, &c. &c. Then they hastened to come within the rays of the rising sun, and to oppress the girls with fluent congratulations and ample attentions. Mrs. Coxe had not thought it worth while to call on the girls before: she had considered that Milly's and Letty's occasional presence in Paradise Row was all that was called for in the light of a gracious recognition of the Newtons, on the part of the family of Mr. Newton's employer. Mrs. Coxe now arrived in state, to display marked friendliness in rejoicing with her neighbours who rejoiced, and in urging upon Nanny and Nell the advisability of making the Coxes' house the Newtons' home during the bustle and confusion of giving up the house in Paradise Row, and

probably having a sale on the premises before the family quitted Foxchester.

Ethel and Maude Pring, who had happened to be staying in Mountshire six months before, hunted up, and brought to the Newtons, local guide-books, containing views of places of interest which must be within not more than twelve or fifteen miles drive of Newton-Hayes. The Prings offered to write to their friends, who were twenty miles off, to ask them to see to anything the Newtons wished done on the spot. The Prings looked, and spoke generally, as if they were entitled, by superior knowledge, to act as prompters and guides in introducing the Newtons to a new region, while the informants counted on a due share of gratitude in return for their obliging services. "You will travel by such and such a train to such and such a station, Nell; Ethel or Papa will put it all down for you, Ethel has a perfect genius for Bradshaw; and mind, you must be careful to order a fly beforehand, for I don't know that there is any cabstand at Atherney—As for Hayes, it is just a little wayside station, I believe, which may be very convenient for your visitors after you are settled in your house, but it is nothing to depend upon in the meantime."

"I don't think we shall need a fly," said Nell

with some spirit, “Mr. Westmacott, the man of business, said that, though the last squire—our cousin in some way—had not stayed at Newton Hayes for a long time, the house had been kept up. It had either been let furnished, or remained in the care of old servants. The stables as well as the gardens, had been attended to, so that we shall find carriage-horses and the carriage waiting for us.” Nell stopped short, the soft rose on her cheek deepening to scarlet. She had caught Nanny’s eye, but she scarcely wanted that reminder to tell her how snobbish her speech might sound.

That was a specimen of Foxchester’s demonstration on the women’s side; on the men’s Harry all at once found himself unboundedly popular. He had difficulty in fighting off a public dinner and a presentation of plate—to him who had just come into possession of the Newton-Hayes plate chest!—in token of his hitherto overlooked merits as a citizen of the town. In lieu of the public dinner and the presentation of plate, he had to consent to grace a succession of private banquets, from which Nanny and Nell begged themselves off, for the most part, on the plea of the accumulation of domestic engagements, before the little household could be broken up and its members transported to fresh scenes.

These demonstrations weighed on Nanny’s mind

and troubled it, if they did not vex anybody else. Harry met them half way and basked in their cordial spirit. Nell cried, with a break in her voice, that she had never known how good and kind people were, and she would never forget it.

Harry Newton had been temperate in his habits, so far back as his Oxford days. Even at that comparatively early date the custom of giving and receiving "wines", and of indulging in half boyish, half mannish excesses and riots, had considerably abated among the undergraduates. At Foxchester Harry had been a model *pater familias*; but he had always been obtuse when the question was of making distinctions—not merely with respect to the social rank but with regard also to the moral and mental calibre of his companions. He would walk and sit complacently, on the most intimate footing, with men who were his inferiors in every light, whose conduct he would not copy. He carried the injunction "judge not" to an unwise, unreasonable, well nigh immoral extent. The consequence was that he infallibly gravitated towards his inferiors. His associates were not, as a rule, fair representatives of the professional and manufacturing circles of Foxchester. This was a cause of anxiety and regret to his daughters. Not merely Nanny, but Nell, with her far less acute

judgment and her multitude of excuses for those she loved, had not liked to see or hear of their father as forming one in the party made up by Mr. Pring, the sporting bank-manager, and Mayor Coppock, the somewhat rowdy carpet-weaver, to shoot crows, or pigeons, or wild ducks, according to the season. It was well known that Mr. Pring habitually took more intoxicating liquor than was good for him, until his family had got so accustomed to the weakness that they did not seem to mind it. Mr. Coppock was more prudent, and relegated his self-indulgence to convenient times and seasons. In other respects he made no bones of it, and would talk without hesitation and with a chuckle of "going on the spree," "taking a lark," "having a break out" on a fitting occasion. It is difficult to comprehend how a man, who had not been given to putting an enemy into his mouth to steal away his brains, could find any satisfaction—a satisfaction which had no self-interest at its root—in the company of others who did the reverse. Yet Harry Newton managed it patiently, complacently, with a sense of not more than half compunctious drollery and diversion in the process. It was his daughters who resented the association for Harry, though it was rarely, indeed, that his careless good fellowship went the length of flushing his cheek and thickening his voice. When the

catastrophe happened it was Nanny and Nell who hung their heads, Harry looked a little awkward but not very penitent afterwards.

Mr. Coxe had more regard for his reputation and position than to imperil them, in a manner not uncommon among respectable men of all ranks, two or three generations ago. He was decorous in all his ways. He was not wont to form one in those roving expeditions which Mr. Pring and Mayor Coppock started periodically. But it was the Newton girls' impression that the head of Coxe and Son had not treated their father handsomely while he was in Mr. Coxe's power. He had, along with his pomposity, a name for close-fistedness. They did not see any special reason why he should become so attached to his head clerk and devoted to his interests now that he was independent of the favour of an employer. It could hardly be said that Harry did not, for himself, see through the sudden change, and balance cause and effect rightly, but his universal tolerance came into play here also. It was natural for Coxe, poor chap, to be inclined to look after him—Harry—now that there was a chance of his figuring in the light of client instead of clerk, now that he was worth something and had Newton-Hayes tacked to his name. What would you have? Old Coxe was very civil and friendly

all the same, and he had taken young Harry into his office, and looked over his deficiencies when he was hardly worth his salt—old Harry was not going to forget that.

No amount of insight, of his own or other people's, could keep Harry from relishing the honours and compliments which were showered upon him. As a small return, he lavished assurances of kindred good will, and scattered invitations broad cast, to Newton-Hayes.

Nanny was too sensitive in her strength, had too fine a sense of what was due to her father, and too tender an affection for him, to dream of taking it upon her to interfere with what he chose to do; an interference which would have annoyed Harry not a little, and would have hurt him as much as anything could, while he pretended to laugh at it, and did not for a moment give in to it. But Nanny did not see why she should not seek to stop Nell, from being suddenly led to swear eternal friendship, after her father's example, to her acquaintances, and from endlessly begging them in the most pressing manner, to test the hospitality of Newton-Hayes.

"Why, Nanny," cried Nell, taken aback and annoyed, "it is all we can do. It would be so odious to keep every good thing to ourselves, and not bid our former friends share it. We are

not going to be ashamed of our past, there is nothing to be ashamed of," protested Nell, quite resentfully, "we are not going to forget old faces. I never expected to hear you make such a suggestion."

"No, Nell, we are not going to be ashamed of the past, not even of having thought of being a High-School Mistress," replied Nanny, with a twinkle of her gray eyes. "But we need not let ourselves be run away with by the mood of the moment, kindly as the mood may be; we are not going to persuade ourselves and other people that we were much fonder of the girls here than we ever were, as you must remember, if you will think of it. We are not going to forget old faces or to refuse to be pleased to see them again; but we are not going to rush into the arms of all and sundry here, and engage to keep open house for them. Because, dear, the rushing would be mere passing excitement and emotion, it would not be genuine feeling. Besides, I'm almost sure the open house would lead to trying complications."

Nell did not look convinced, she appeared for the moment to think Nanny a dreadfully cold-blooded individual. "Of course, I shall not do anything you do not wish," she said a little stiffly, as if she were feeling a trifle snubbed. "You are the elder and you must be the mistress of Newton-Hayes."

"Nonsense!" said Nanny, with a little asperity, "as if there could be a question of who should be the mistress of father's house, between us, Nell! No, I want you to see for yourself. Shall you like to see Mr. Pring, with his bleared eyes and copper coloured nose, and Mayor Coppock, with his jokes about our getting husbands, coming on a visit to Newton-Hayes? Do you think they will be in keeping with the place and the people there, as we hope to find them?"

"That is different," said Nell quickly.

"Not very," maintained Nanny. "I don't mean to be carping and critical, but you know we never cared very much for Milly and Letty Coxe, nor the Pring girls, nor Kate Coppock; we never agreed particularly well with them, why should we begin to fancy we shall now? There are several of our old companions in Dresden to whom there need not be the smallest objection. For that matter, I have no doubt there are unexceptionable people in Foxchester, such as the Halls and the Bannisters, only father does not happen to know many of them, and of the nicest he knows and we know, they are the very people we can't have, because they are somehow fixtures here. There is Dr. Panton, who brought us both into the world, and who was so kind to you when you broke your arm, two summers ago, and so careful of

father when he had quinsy, he is wedded to his practice and, when he is a day out of harness, considers it owing to his sons in London and his married daughter in Liverpool. There is Mary Myer, but she has the parish, as well as her old uncle, on her shoulders since the vicar's wife died. And there are mother's kind friends, the three Misses Cray, who have grown to think themselves too old to go from home, unless in a case of need—to be of use to some of their innumerable nephews and grand nephews and their families."

Thoughtful as Nanny was, her warning was not entirely due to her own deductions. Lady Gosforth had written, rejoicing in her old friend's good fortune and giving his elder daughter some excellent advice. "I have no wish to make you heartless," the monitor wrote, "but I must caution you. Your first step in a new world may make or mar your future. It is of the greatest consequence that you should keep yourselves free, and try to give a good impression to begin with. You owe it to yourselves, you girls, and to your father. Don't hang mill-stones round your necks, it will do no good to other people, while it may be fatal to you, for you will want all that is in your favour on your own account. Be sure that you are off reasonably with 'the old love' Foxchester, to which I think you were not excessively attached, before

you are on with 'the new' Newton-Hayes, where I hope and trust you will take root and prosper. Above all things, avoid undesirable complications."

It was on a hot slumberous July afternoon that the Newtons arrived at the nearest railway station where Newton-Hayes was in question. Travelling was very fatiguing in such weather. The whole party had undergone a good deal of mental strain lately. They were literally trembling with expectation; even Harry was moved. If Mr. Westmacott had not had the sense to defer implicitly to their wishes, as to keeping their arrival a secret known only to himself and the servants at the house, and if he had not put down his foot imperatively on every suggestion of a tenants' demonstration, it is hard to say what might not have happened. The Newtons' manners had not been trained to the conventional repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere. But there was only the comfortable commonplace, somewhat shabby old carriage and its fat horses, which looked, nevertheless, to the travellers' dazzled eyes, very like Cinderella's transformed pumpkin, awaiting them, and Harry and his daughters drove, as in a dream, along a pretty country road, over the long shadows cast by the way-side elms and beeches, across the dusty high-way.

The carriage and its occupants presently turned

in at an open gateway, guarded by an antiquated Swiss cottage, and drove up a lime tree avenue, with the limes already causing a light yellow litter, on the red gravel, by their fast dropping seed-leaves, and came in sight of the house. It was not a Norman Castle nor an Elizabethan Manor-house, it was Jacobean in date, with long French windows and a portico rather too big for the size of the house. It opened on a tolerably extensive lawn, dotted with well-grown conifers, and sloping down to a mossy paling, which divided it from a wooded undulating park, full of lights and shadows. It was all very different from Paradise Row.

Harry stepped down, a little shakily, handed out his daughters, and proceeded to mount with them the flight of steps to the hall door. It stood open and within were ranged the servants, partly engaged by Mr. Westmacott, and partly sent down from London by Lady Gosforth. They were, no doubt, as curious to see and form an opinion on their future master and mistresses as these were to make the acquaintance of the household to which they had come. It was a trying moment for both. As Nanny glanced at Nell, trembling and ready to sink under the burden of honour and novelty, and at her father bland, yet vacillating between old associations with

Oxford times, and the experience of the last quarter of a century, there flashed across the elder sister's mind what Lady Gosforth had written of the importance of a first impression. The Newtons had come to rule there, and it was not enough for them to show their subjects a handsome, portly gentleman with two daughters fair enough to see. Somebody must take the initiative, somebody must exhibit himself or herself equal to the occasion.

Nanny took in the servants at a glance, and picked out the bowing and becking housekeeper. It was necessary for the girl to assert her supremacy with all the graciousness she could command. She did not know how much she had till she tried. Nanny, with courteous, out-stretched hand, advanced straight to the domestic power in black silk.

"We are very glad to be here, Mrs. Williams." (Nanny never forgot names.) "I am sure you have everything in excellent order for us."

"And we are very glad to see you, and the young ladies, Sir." Mrs. Williams addressed the head of the house in the first place, while she executed her best curtsy in thanks. "It is good of you, Miss, to give us credit for doing our best."

"Laws!" said Mrs. Williams afterwards, in confidential talk with her ally the butler, "to think

them nasty gossips were beginning to say the new family were nothing but hunder-strappers, had been in trade or somethink; and here they are, as fine an elderly gentleman and as pretty a pair of young ladies as ever I see. And them dressed that simple and right, in plain travelling dresses, where them half and half, as knows no better would have been trapesing in silks and laces. As for Miss Newton, who will be at the head of her pa's table, there ain't much of her to be sure, but **what there is might belong to a young duchess.**"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST VISITOR AND HIS SUCCESSORS.

THE Newtons were passing rich in comparison with what Harry's income as a clerk in an office in Foxchester had been; but the few thousands a year, which represented the rental of Newton-Hayes, did not constitute them either millionaires or a county family to be courted and caressed, with all their peculiarities to be swallowed at a gulp. The Newtons were only comfortably well off in the acceptance of the world they had entered. The estate was entailed on male heirs, but as Mr. Newton had no son and was not likely to marry again after he had remained so long a widower, the property might, with the consent of the next heirs, be disentailed, so that respectable dowries could be found for the daughters. But, even then, though they might be suitably provided for, they could be hardly regarded as co-heiresses, unless in the eyes of the needy.

Notwithstanding this diminution of social advantages, it was a clear gain to the not very populous neighbourhood to have a country-house occupied by fairly presentable people, instead of standing empty, or having for tenants stray visitors for whose antecedents nobody, as a rule, was inclined to vouch.

The Newtons were a branch of the old Newtons of Newton-Hayes, who had been—not to say distinguished, but perfectly creditable—features of provincial society for a good many more generations than any old inhabitant could recall. Of course, their representatives must be noticed, unless they had contracted, in their season of obscurity, such objectionable traits as could not be passed over by the civilized world. But Lady Gosforth volunteered to be their sponsor; Lady Gosforth was known to this section of Mountshire society and believed in by it, through her cousin, Mrs. Wentworth of St. Catherine's, who was going to call very soon on the Misses Newton.

In the meantime, these lucky people were living in an agreeable dream, half doubtful if they were awake, entranced for the moment with their fresh surroundings, and seeking to accommodate themselves to their change of environment. This process might, with many persons, have been so laborious and against the grain as to have

greatly qualified the enjoyment, but it was not so, to begin with, in the Newton's case. Harry was perfect in his philosophy, as ready to be Alexander as to be Diogenes; not troubling himself greatly with the requirements of empire, because of the ever present conviction that he was a man first, while to be an emperor or a squire was a matter of secondary consideration. It was a man—equally a man who sat in a tub, or on a throne—who presided at an office desk, or loitered over his newspapers and smoked a dear instead of a cheap brand of cigars on the lawn, and rode a thorough-bred. Therefore, as an inevitable deduction, he could do either when put to the test. Besides, Harry had grown up a rich man's son, though the riches were colonial and had come and gone quickly. He returned easily to many exemptions and indulgences of wealth, like a man born to them.

Nanny and Nell had not received the same training, but they were thoroughly well-educated—(exceptionally intelligent in Nanny's case,) gentlewomen at heart and still young enough to acquire, without difficulty, the habits of the class into which they had been drafted. Perhaps there is nothing which the sons and daughters of men can more easily pick up than a certain amount of luxurious usage.

Newton-Hayes was not superlatively grand, although it stood altogether apart from Paradise Row. It was an old-fashioned rather than an ancient country house, easy to live in and like, as most old-fashioned country houses are. It had not every modern improvement and convenience, such as electric lighting and hot-water pipes. Its grounds, gardens, hot-houses and park which had seemed so extensive as well as so charming to Nanny and Nell, were not really very extensive, far less princely. Its staff of domestics—indoors and out—did not amount to much more than a dozen, though they seemed a multitude in relation to Marianne and her sub in Paradise Row. (Marianne had solved a difficulty by taking the opportunity of marrying when the Newtons quitted Foxchester, and the sub was too young to go far from her mother.) The prestige of Newton-Hayes was a modest prestige, respectable for its rank but modest, not like that of a great land-owner or a wealthy peer. The place had been kept up, as Mr. Westmacott had said, but a good deal of the furniture was worn and out of date, without being antique. It was solidly substantial, however, and some of it was quaintly elegant.

Nanny and Nell had the good taste to see how well it agreed with the house, and had no wish to remove and replace it piecemeal. They were

sensible that, in many lights, nothing could be better than the old oak of the dining-room and the old rosewood and satinwood of the drawing-room, and that any alteration, to be in harmony, must be made after much thought and very gradually. The most disappointing detail was that of the pictures. Nell had indulged in visions, which Nanny had not been guiltless of sharing, of a picture gallery with rows of portraits of knights in armour, and dames and damsels in farthingales and wimples, or at least in the guise of Arcadian shepherdesses.

There was no gallery, and the pictures in the public rooms fell considerably short of the mark. If the Newton race went back to knights in armour and ladies in farthingales, or else bearing crooks and attended by lambs, the family had not patronised art in those days. The Governor of a West Indian Island, wearing a brown coat with gilt buttons, and a lace cravat and ruffles, and having his hair in a queue was one Newton, who had been painted in his day; another was an officer who had fought in the American War and was represented in a long vest, a low-necked regimental coat, knee-breeches and silk stockings; another showed a minor church dignitary in his gown and bands, with a full bottom wig under his shovel hat. The pictures of an old lady in

a mob cap, with a kerchief crossed over her bosom, and pinned under her chin; of a young lady in a gypsy hat and a short-sleeved white gown with long black mittens, and of a child, in a cap like that of its grandmother, with a basket, full of cherries, balanced impossibly on its lap, were about the most notable there. Neither Sir Joshua, nor Gainsborough, nor Romney had painted them, which was one reason, perhaps, why they were all so stiff and wooden and generally so hard-featured. The present generations of Newtons, however descended, were a great improvement, in looks, on their progenitors. No likeness of an elderly man with a Napoleonic profile, every curve softened by natural suavity and urbanity, was to be seen among them. No reflection of dainty faces, full of *esprit*, or of Madonna faces radiant and benignant, were there to foreshadow the personalities of Nanny and Nell. Nanny placed a good photograph of their mother on a little easel, and said to herself softly, as she looked at the comely, pleasing lineaments which the sun had preserved in black and white, that the Newton, who had begun by being a Bates, beat in attractiveness all the other Newtons of more aristocratic extraction. An old county family was all very well, but a family of any kind, in which the men were good citizens, sober and diligent, crowned

with true manliness, and the women were modest, keepers at home, careful mistresses of their households, tender rearers of their children, could compete with all other families in really estimable qualities, whether physical or spiritual, without fear of the result.

The first visitor was a caller on Harry, an elderly man and a widower like Harry, the Newtons' next neighbour, Mr. Peregrine Saville of Briarley. He was tall and thin, suspiciously dark in his moustache and peaked beard, considering the sparseness of the closely cut crop on his head, and the manner in which it retreated from his temples. He had an aristocratic face of a fine aquiline type. He was well dressed and well preserved, and yet he had not been able to escape a slightly battered air. He did not need to affect to be a man of the world. He gave most new-comers, introduced to him, the impression that he had gone through many and varied experiences, an impression which the first breath of rumour confirmed. For, as everybody who knew anything of the county, was aware and did not hesitate to mention, Mr. Peregrine Saville had led a fast and reckless life from youth to the verge of age. He had run through two fortunes—one of them his late wife's—and while keeping up in public the appearance

of connubial felicity, he was supposed to have hastened, in private, the unfortunate lady's exit from the world, by every means short of what would have subjected him to the criminal law. His manners would have been perfect, had there not been a sneering element in his bland cynicism, to which, to be sure, some people did not object. The same people were inclined to think the lounging grace of a gait, which had never been hurried by any earnest intention, or any useful purpose, and the supercilious droop of the eyelids over the shifty eyes, perfect also.

Mr. Peregrine Saville was understood to have sown his wild oats, in the shape of gambling and betting and it was high time he should have sown them. He was in too embarrassed circumstances, with his credit too nearly exhausted, to attempt more than vegetating, with some lingering remains of sumptuous living and dilettante dandyism, at his stripped and dilapidated place of Briarley. His son and only child, Captain Peregrine, or Captain Perry as he was best known, was in a crack regiment, in which it was readily believed he had a hard fight to live honestly on his pay and his scanty insufficient allowance, since his conscience was reported to be less elastic than that of his worthy father.

Harry brought Mr. Saville to the drawing-

room in order to introduce him to his daughters, who gave their verdict upon him when he was gone.

"I think I never met such an agreeable man, except that I am not sure he was not laughing at us in his sleeve all the time," said Nell doubtfully. "He looks as if he could be very entertaining, but I am afraid it would be at other people's expense."

"He is detestable," said Nanny promptly.

"My dear," remonstrated her father, who was present, "do not be so severe. The poor beggar has hard enough lines dealt out to him without having our hasty condemnation added to them. Think of a man of his age, a fine, dashing fellow, with no end of temptations to lavishness when he began his career, positively hard up in a gentlemanly way. I heard all about it from Westmacott, who, by the way, seems to have rather a prejudice against Saville—the old story of the fighter with his back at the wall; all the best timber in his very avenue has gone to the hammer. Every building, fence and drain on the land is in a ruinous state. His son, who ought to have come into Briarley—if not clear, at least with some means on which he could retrench and hope to effect a clearance of the debt—handicapped with the mere name of an estate mort-

gaged to the last straw, and barely fit to pay the interest on the mortgages. How should you or I like it, Missie?" (An old name of Harry's for Nanny.)

"I should not like it at all," said Nanny firmly, "more than that, I would not have it, whether the difficulties were of my own making or not. I would not go on floundering in the mud out of which there was no possibility of my extricating myself. I would throw everything up and begin afresh."

"Easily said," declared Harry, with provoking incredulity.

Mr. Peregrine Saville was passing his verdict on the two girls, which was so favourable that, if they had heard it, to have found fault with him would have sounded like base ingratitude.

"Fine girls to be the daughters of that simpleton, sorry that my day is too far through for their charms to be of the first interest to me. Gad! though, one of them might be that fool Perry's bargain, the bigger, rosier and softer of the two. My son is such an ass that he will not sell himself against the gentleman's squeamish taste, and without the possibility of making his wife some return in the shape of conjugal affection, domestic bliss and the rest of the rot. He cannot make the barter in the highest market

because we Savilles are on our last legs beyond concealment. What will these Newton girls' fortunes be, I wonder? If the entail were broken to-morrow, I daresay a paltry forty or fifty thousand would be the utmost. Lord! we are near the end of our tether when we take such a contemptible sum into consideration. But there is some advantage in having a simpleton for a father-in-law. I've a notion I may find him available as a neighbour and future family connection. I should not be surprised if the other girl—the little vixen with the desperately clear-cut nose and mouth and sharp gray eyes—that sort are always vixens—never marries, does not find a man good enough for her—insolent gypsy! But all the better for the warm brown Murillo beauty and for that ungrateful rascal, Perry."

Other visitors came in succession, on horse and on foot, in masculine traps and feminine pony-carriages and high Norwegian carts. Men and women bluff, querulous, heavy, flighty, all well-bred, all more or less curious and critical. Harry, without question, was pleased with everybody, and as a rule he pleased people in turn, though he surprised them also.

Nell was charmed by the suitability and harmony of the ladies' out-of-door costumes, though they did not appear to be in the extreme of the

fashion like those of Ethel and Maud Pring, and by the ease and self-possession of the wearers' tone and bearing—though these showed not only the suave agreeability of Mr. Peregrine Saville's conversation, they also betrayed the same lurking, not always restrained, tinge of cynical mockery.

Nanny looked and listened with all her might, and paused a little in arriving at a conclusion, which, she was aware, would be of the utmost consequence to her.

If Harry took kindly to the gentlemen, he took still more kindly to the ladies, who all began forthwith to pet and make much of him, with a familiarity and freedom, which were a little startling to his daughter's inexperience. "Are they calling him 'a good creature', 'a poor dear man—not bad, not at all bad in his handsome, unsophisticated way,'" Nanny asked herself jealously. "Are they preparing to make him fetch and carry for them?" Nanny continued her private investigation, perhaps more indignantly than she was entitled to feel.

Then Nell said, with a little half vexed laugh: "What kind of Philistines did they expect to find us, Nanny? I saw them exchanging quick glances over those water-colour sketches of yours, which you were arranging in your portfolio, and

at the music on the piano. I don't believe any of them can paint like you, and I think I play and sing tolerably well for an amateur."

"Perhaps, my dear, they think us spoilt professionals," said Nanny dryly, "I heard them putting you quietly through a tentative catechism—Were you a good horse-woman?"

"And of course I answered I never was on horseback in my life," burst in Nell.

"Did you care for driving? was the next article in the cross-examination."

"And I told them I could not drive so much as a donkey, though I had ridden one occasionally," explained Nell with a nod.

"Were you just out, or had you been in town the season before last when darling old Lady Latimer, whom grandmamma remembered as quite intimate with dear Mrs. Newton, poor Mr. Jasper Newton's wife, died. Indeed, the ladies were related in some degree through Mrs. Jasper Newton, and, in that case, you might be a kinswoman also—not only of Lady Latimer, but of her daughter, Mrs. Van Goring, who gave such charming dances the year before last.

"And I had to own," said Nell laughing, "that I had never heard either of old Lady Latimer or of Mrs. Van Goring, though, if they were related to the late Mr. Newton, there was a faint

probability that they were related to us in some remote fashion."

"Do you know what I am reminded of, Nell?" inquired Nanny as she re-arranged a pile of Noisette roses in a bowl near her. The quiet sarcasm of her tone was tempered by a sense of absurdity, which dimpled her cheeks and made her rather grave eyes and the slightly severe curve of her lips shine and quiver with suppressed laughter. "It is of an out-of-date book, I daresay these ladies have barely heard of it, though it was a classic in the days of their great-grandmothers; we read it, without fail, because in France and Germany it is still translated by school girls as an example of standard English fiction."

"Do you mean 'the Vicar of Wakefield'?" asked Nell, puzzled.

"Have you forgotten George, the Vicar's second son, and his efforts to get a situation to earn a living at the beginning of the family misfortunes? How he sought to be made an usher in a school, but was warned off by a testing catechism. Had he gone through scarlet fever and small pox? Could he sleep three in a bed, &c. &c. The exams.—as father calls them still—which are for the purpose of ascertaining if we are qualified to be fine ladies are as follows:—Are we good horse-

women? Have we exhibited our figures and our horses' paces in the Row? Can we whip up a pony or a pair of ponies in a basket carriage? Can we carry father, since we have no brother, sitting beside us, with his arms crossed, to and from the railway station? Can we carry ourselves on our own small errands—to show at a meet or to join the luncheon of a shooting party? Do we get our smartest frocks from Madame Elise or from Worth? Did we appear on one magical occasion, as members of a superb crowd in feathers and trains, and kiss a royal lady's hand? Were we at one of the choice routs of the season?"

Harry was not present to hush the tongue—glib for the nonce, and just a little tipped with gall. It fell to Nell to say, almost piteously, "But, after the rubicon is crossed and the initiatory letters are mastered, surely there is something worth attaining beyond, Nanny?"

"I hope so, I devoutly hope so," said Nanny in earnest again, but with a shade of doubt in her hope.

"And are you certain, quite certain about what we ought to do as to returning these visits?" asked Nell, puckering her smooth brow anxiously, "we ought not to be too long, and on the other hand we should not go too soon. We may make a mistake, we cannot be perfectly

sure of the etiquette of the thing. Father is only a man and, though he used to visit at country houses, it was long ago, and he is careless of what people in novels—and I suppose those people who have just been here—call the *bien-séances*. Could not you write to Lady Gosforth and ask her particularly?”

“Write to Lady Gosforth and ask her to tell us how to behave properly,” cried Nanny, rearing her small figure with a positively majestic display of impatience and scorn. “No, though I have the greatest respect for Lady Gosforth, and would ask her advice and follow it too, if it were necessary, and if I saw its reasonableness. Don’t trouble yourself, Nell, dear, if we do commit small blunders, it is not breaking the moral law. And if it is the interest of these ladies and gentlemen to overlook our peccadilloes, depend upon it they will find them delightfully piquant and use them as another argument for patronizing us. If it is not their interest, and if the critics are not larger minded and larger hearted, why, they can condemn us to any condign punishment they choose, for anything I care!”

But Nanny was speaking in ignorance and short-sightedness, in spite of her general intelligence.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENERAL INVITATION TO FOXCHESTER, WITH THE RESULT.

IT was unfortunate that Lady Gosforth was prevented by a fit of illness from visiting her cousin, Mrs. Wentworth, at St. Catherine's, and the Newtons at Newton-Hayes towards the end of the summer, as she had intended; she might have done some good, she would have given shrewd practical advice, which would have recommended itself to Nanny's common-sense. Lady Gosforth might have smoothed down certain rumples and bridged over certain gaps, which are sure to arise when people, with not very much in common, brought up differently, with associations which clash, are drawn suddenly into the close contact of a comparatively limited circle. She tried to act by proxy, through her cousin Mrs. Wentworth, but Mrs. Wentworth, though a

generally well-mannered, friendly woman, was shallow and, in reality, timid. She did not like to take any compromising step, she did not care to go against the verdict of her neighbours; while Mr. Wentworth, a burly country gentleman, had not time to spare for the question, and the Wentworth daughters were too young, to have an opinion of their own, and to act upon it.

The Wentworths were willing to call on the Newtons and to show them a little attention, both out of neighbourliness and for the sake of Lady Gosforth, but, as to making any advances to cordial intimacy, these were too rash and daring, and not to be thought of. The Wentworths must wait, until they could see and hear at what conclusions their world in Mountshire arrived, with regard to the newcomers, who were undeniably not like other people, not to the manner born of county gentry. It could not be settled on the spur of the moment, whether the interlopers were to be kept at a distance, or admitted freely into the magic ring.

There did not seem much harm in the poor suspected people; not one of them could be called vulgarly offensive, though they might all be classed as a little odd, and decidedly out of the running. The old gentleman (Harry was just the man to lapse rapidly into the mingled privileges

and deprivations of advancing years) was college-bred and looked very good-natured. The girls were unusually pretty and accomplished, and were undeniably ladylike, in an unconventional style, still, they were not exactly like girls in their position. The Misses Newton were independent and *outrées*, as well as primitive in their ideas, and they must suffer for it by undergoing quarantine.

Even if Lady Gosforth could have come promptly to the rescue, or if Mrs. Wentworth had been other than what she was, reaction must have set in, just as the girls found driving in the Newton-Hayes carriage convenient but flat, after a time, and Harry shrugged his shoulders presently at the space and style of the gardens. He could not attempt to take them into his own hands. He believed he should never be at liberty to take a spade or a three-pronged fork, or a Dutch hoe in his grip again. He understood that a spud was the proper tool for a squire, but what did he care for waging war with lawn daisies or plantains? It was not on his own account that he deprived himself of his hobby; his dignity might take care of itself. It was to save the feelings of his head gardener, Tomkins. Harry would never forget Tomkins' aggrieved, disgusted face, when he found his master had stolen a march upon him, and was digging up a

row of potatoes. Why not? Why not dig potatoes, as well as look at prize pigs and poke fat cattle in the ribs? But Tomkins did not see it. A country-house garden, with a head gardener and his subs, was not to be compared for enjoyment to the cockney strip of garden—as he supposed people would call it—at Paradise Row. He was his own master there, and the monarch of all he surveyed, in the true sense of the words—maker as well as monarch. He could almost have wished himself back again.

Nanny said less about her *désillusionnement*, but she began very soon to wonder where those superior souls, those higher intelligences with the wider horizons, she had expected to find in the society round Newton-Hayes, were to be discovered. She began to suspect people were much the same in all ranks, a few wise and many foolish, a few larger-hearted and larger-minded and many of meaner calibre. The gossip, in the higher walks of life, might have more polish and refinement, but it was gossip still. It was not less petty, it was, if anything, more frivolous, and was quite as ill-natured, nay, it had, sometimes, an evilly scandalous element, lacking in the talk of the respectable, despised Philistines. The manner might be an immense improvement, to those to whom languid grace and airy inso-

lence are everything, the matter was much the same—inferior on the whole. For did not blasé, idleness, the want of a serious pursuit even in earning a livelihood, or making money, the consciousness of a mill-stone of debts, round many a so-called high-bred neck, with no escape from ruin, save by the adoption of the meanest, most ignoble shifts, cause infallible deterioration and degradation?

Nanny did not entertain quite these sentiments, when a jocose letter arrived from Foxchester, written in the name of Mr. Pring, announcing that he and Coppock were about to take their friend Newton at his word, on the following day, in order to have the first pop at the partridges, and, for once in his life, old Coxe was to bear them company, to keep them in order and see that they were good boys during their outing.

Even Harry looked a little blank, when he read the letter, though his countenance quickly cleared, and he hurried away to speak to his game-keeper and arrange about sending early to the station, next morning. Then he came back to consult Nanny, on what they had better have for lunch and dinner, to suit the visitors.

“Personal friends, you know,” said Harry hastily, “delighted to see them, must do our best for them, and take care that they enjoy themselves.”

When their father left the room his daughters looked at each other in dismay.

Than a comical thought tickled Nell.

"The Aylmers and the Barrets were talking to each other, when they were here the other day, about their cousins, and, upon my word, to listen to them you would have thought they were connected with the whole Baronetage and Peerage," and Nell gave a little half envious sigh.

"Happy people!" said Nanny, ironically.

"I was left out of the conversation," went on Nell, "until the tall Miss Aylmer—I think her name is Betty—said she had no doubt my cousins were legion also."

"And what did you say?" demanded Nanny, bending her straight brows.

Nell hung her head for an instant.

"I said 'Oh! no, I had not many cousins—none, on my father's side, for he was an only child. I had cousins on my mother's side—there were Uncle John's children in a Somerset Vicarage——'"

"And that was all?" asked Nanny, again with a mortified sinking of her voice.

"No," said Nell, looking up brightly, "I had no sooner spoken than I thought of dear, good Uncle Fred in Oxford, and kind Auntie, and the nice children. I am sure I like them a hundred

times better than the clerical cousins—so I added ‘Oh! and I have an uncle and an aunt and a family of cousins in Oxford!’ I’m sure I don’t care though they find out Uncle Fred has a shop. To be a linen-draper is not to be a thief!”

“Quite right, Nell,” said Nanny approvingly, “but I wish you had said straight out that he was a linen-draper,” with a slight return of her discontent. “Why, they may think we have led them to suppose he was a full blown professor—if not the Head of a House.”

“But that would have been bravado,” objected Nell, with the sterling common-sense which underlay her girlish ignorances and sillinesses.

“Perhaps,” owned Nanny reluctantly, “but we must take the bull by the horns, if we are ever to keep our own with these people. They are very well off if none of them has a worse skeleton, than that of a linen-draper, in his or her cupboard.”

“It has just occurred to me, Nanny,” resumed Nell, “that the County may suppose the Foxchester gentlemen are our uncles and cousins.”

“It would be very unfair to our uncles and cousins if the County did, but never mind what people suppose,” said Nanny grimly, “and perhaps Mr. Coxe will keep the two others in order.”

“I wonder why he comes with them?” specu-

lated Nell. "He was not in the habit of joining them in their excursions."

"He comes to spy the land," said Nanny, in a tone of conviction, "and he may find it more economical to travel one in three than singly," A correct conjecture.

Nanny never forgot that incursion of Foxchester worthies, though she was vexed with herself for minding it so much. She felt she was disloyal to both father and mother, in being greatly put out. Yet, from beginning to end, the couple of days was an unmitigated trial. The visitors arrived, with one exception, in a hilarious mood. Mr. Pring and Mr. Coppock always took their pleasures noisily. Mr. Coppock was a decidedly stout man, though active for his size and years; Mr. Pring was conspicuously dilapidated. They wore fancy check shooting suits, and reminded Nanny irresistibly of the comic illustrations of sporting tours—yet neither man was a cockney, and both were fair shots. They had a considerable amount of practice, Mr. Pring not only took out a license, but shot, every September, over whatever yeoman's farm he could command. Still they had no more the air and tone of the genuine article, than a Londoner, in full Highland costume, resembles a son of the mountains. The groom, who drove the trio from the station,

Braintree the butler, and the game-keepers all eyed the visitors askance, as so many curiosities.

Mr. Coxe had no aspirations after sport and was a mere looker-on, but in his iron-gray summer suit, which, from choice, was as nearly as possible a reflection of the professional black—the wear for lawyers in Mr. Coxe's young days—his person was as incongruous a spectacle in the stubble and turnip fields, as were the persons of his companions in their grotesque habiliments.

From the moment of their arrival Messrs. Pring and Coppock were hail-fellow-well-met with everybody. They talked and laughed their loudest, discussed racy Foxchester news, wondered, before the servants in the background, how many admirers the young ladies had found in Mountshire, and which of the girls would be the first to go off.

Mr. Coppock, with true free and easy wit, kept addressing every man and maid he encountered as, "Here you, Samivel, Jonathan, Marianne, Anna Mariar," to the tittering bewilderment of the domestic staff.

Mr. Pring did not wait for his host to ask him, a second time, to help himself to a brandy and soda, yet he stood so greatly in need of farther refreshment, that, in walking through the village of Hayes, on his way to the nearest

plantation, he felt compelled to drop into the first ale-house in order to ascertain whether the publican's beer was "clear."

"Your tipples all very well, my boy," Mr. Pring told Harry, with a bibulous wink, "but after all there is nothing like a pub, for a man, when he is hanged thirsty."

"Go ahead, Pring," shouted the jovial Coppock, "there are plenty of wheel-barrows about."

Nanny and Nell did not meet the sportsmen in order to give them afternoon tea, but Nanny saw all that happened in her mind's eye, as distinctly as if she had been present. How the two "poppers", at Harry's partridges, would go stamping, banging and shouting, right and left. How the invaders would not be careful to keep to their entertainer's side of the road, but, in spite of Harry's remonstrances, would stray defiantly, laughing in his face, as far adrift as an afternoon's shooting would carry them. They strayed into the Briarley preserves, of all places, as Nanny afterwards learnt to her disgust. The men came "slap", as they expressed it, on the Grand Turk himself. He accepted Harry's stammered apology most readily and courteously, while he took in the whole situation at a glance, through his half-closed eye-lids, and sneered his Mephistopheles sneer under his moustache. He made a

note of the scene, to serve as stock for the next company he entered.

Mr. Coxe did not put himself forward, but he spied the land, beyond any manner of doubt. His curiosity was insatiable. He asked the game-keeper how many boxes of birds were sent to the London Market, he took the liberty of cross-examining the man as to his wages. The lawyer even lagged behind and accosted a farmer and his wife who were walking their horse and market-cart up a hill, to inquire what were the market-prices for farm produce, in that part of the county, and if they could tell him what was the value of land, per acre, of the home farm, which the agent for the squire had managed for the late Mr. Newton.

The dinner at Newton-Hayes that day was uproarious, and Nanny and Nell sat sick at heart, waiting for the gentlemen's appearance in the drawing-room afterwards. The reality was worse than the anticipation in the unsteady steps, the thickened voices, the fumes of wine and brandy. Even Mr. Coxe's habitual sobriety had been unable to stand the force of evil example. Harry, as host, was beyond escape.

The one redeeming circumstance was the accident of Mr. Coppock falling asleep, and snoring heavily on a lounge, which groaned under

his weight, in a corner of the drawing-room. He had previously given Nell a hiccuping invitation to the piano, and she had been too pained and frightened to refuse his command rather than request. It was well known in Foxchester that its Mayor, however good-natured when sober, had a propensity to be quarrelsome in his cups, which, fortunately, were incidental, not perennial, like Mr. Pring's. If the last degradation of a drunken row had wound up the festivity, Nanny felt as if she and Nell must have hidden their humbled heads for evermore.

As for Mr. Pring, he was placable, not belligerent, under the influence of the stimulants to which he was so well accustomed. He was content to smile in a maudlin fashion, to listen to Nell's tremulous music, and to play a never ending game of draughts with Harry, in which the players were constantly dropping their pieces, while Mr. Coxe looked on solemnly.

The second day was like the first, but relief was at hand. The guests left by the last train which stopped at the little station, and even Harry drew a shame-faced sigh of satisfaction when they were gone.

Alas! the mischief was done, within a week, in every drawing-room and smoking-room, by every covert in a circuit of a good many miles

the style of company, which had been down to Newton-Hayes, was taken to pieces and torn to tatters. It was told, as a well authenticated fact, that the late Mrs. Harry Newton had been the daughter of a tradesman in Oxford—of all exclusive regions, sacred to learning and the golden youth of the upper ten thousand. Harry's career there leaked out. He had not been rusticated, it could not even be said that he was plucked, since he had to quit the University in the middle of his curriculum, on his father's ruin. But he was said to have displayed inveterately low tastes, and to have elected himself unfit for the company of gentlemen. There was a more sinister report that his father had been either a convict or a bushranger, but nobody who had been in Harry's company could give credence to this last sop to Cerberus.

The two daughters were to be pitied, poor things, for though they came of the people, the girls were not like unlicked cubs, or miserable cads of boys. The Misses Newton might lack a *je ne sais quoi* of breeding, but they were a pair of beauties in their different styles, as well as having small fortunes, fit enough to pass muster, well-educated and all that kind of rot. This, of course, was the men's verdict. The same censors were less disposed to be merciful to Harry,

even the dowagers were tempted to give him up.

"Gad! you have him nowhere," one bluff enough Squire reported contemptuously. "'Ride, I should say so,' he told me with a laugh, 'in the Colonies we're born riding, but I haven't had much practice for many a long day, and I am getting a heavy weight, a stout cob should about do my business now, a merciful man should be merciful to his beast, eh?'" and he's stones lighter than I! True, the fellow had the coolness to tell me he did not mean to hunt, though he had paid the subscription, that he never had a mania for killing creatures at any time, perhaps, because he had been rather fond of studying them and their habits; when he was a young fellow he could have set up a bear-garden or a menagerie, with all the pleasure in life. I tell you, the beggar is no good. If he should get a seat on the bench, it is as likely as not he will take the part of some scoundrelly poacher. And if he thinks fit to bring a low rowdy set about him, we have no choice, save to cut him dead."

CHAPTER IX.

LADY GOSFORTH'S OPINION. THE PLEASANT PROCESS OF BEING SENT TO COVENTRY.

"I AM afraid, Nanny, you have—all of you—made rather a mess of it. It is only right to warn you," said Lady Gosforth, who, the first time she came to the Wentworths, drove over to Newton-Hayes, and had an opportunity of speaking confidentially to Nanny, while professing to examine the contents of the old-fashioned greenhouses.

Nanny looked down. "I am afraid we have," she admitted, "but I could not help it, indeed, I do not see how it could very well have been prevented," she added more firmly, raising her eyes to Lady Gosforth's vexed face.

Her ladyship arrested the retort on her lips and said to herself, "Of course, I cannot blame the girl's father to her. I cannot say, to his own daughter, that poor Harry is, and always has been a soft-hearted, thick-skinned fool." She

turned the conversation a little and said, "I believe you and your sister have also been having some of your old acquaintances over from Foxchester."

Nanny could give a half smile now. "Only Ethel and Maud Pring, when they were visiting their other friends in Mountshire. The Coxe girls had an opportunity of spending some weeks in London, and naturally preferred that. Oh, by-the-by, Bertie Coxe took Newton-Hayes on his bicycle tour, but he only stayed for a few hours."

"Do you think me an arch-inquisitor, Nanny?" asked Lady Gosforth composedly. "Never mind, it is all for your good. I did hear of the advent of some young ladies who were only too smart, whose tailor-made gowns were *de rigueur*." And Lady Gasforth also relaxed into a smile.

"The poor things!" cried Nanny, unable to resist the temptation to laugh outright, as she called up their figures, but she said what she could in their defence. "I am sure they need not have given offence. They were so anxious to pick up all they could in a limited time. I believe though, that they were a little disappointed in the place and the people, and thought us just a trifle dowdy, old-fashioned and slow. But that was the greater triumph for them."

"And young Coxe?"

"He got on well enough to begin with. The

Aylmers and Lascelles happened to call when he was here, and Betty Aylmer and Madge Lascelles did not think it beneath their dignity to amuse themselves by drawing him out. He did not see it at first, and was flattered by their interest in him and his tour. When he discovered they were making game of him, he did not like it, naturally, but his annoyance was only an additional entertainment to them. Perhaps you have heard of that also. There seems so little to talk about in country-houses."

"You are severe, Nanny. I grant that I do not think Betty Aylmer and Madge Lascelles acted quite as ladies should act. For that matter I do not consider Betty Aylmer altogether well-bred, though she is a fashionable girl, and much in request because she has a lively, mocking tongue."

Nell had come into the conservatory and heard the last words. "Oh, Lady Gosforth, I am so glad to hear you say so," she exclaimed impulsively, "though it may sound unkind," apologized Nell, who was usually the soul of kindness. "I really cannot bear these Miss Aylmers. They drag about an old aunt, to whom they are indebted for a home and everything, solely to please themselves, without even the pretence of consulting her inclinations."

"Worse than that," declared Nanny, with

indignant condemnation, "They think no shame of making use of anybody they can hang upon, so long as it suits their convenience. They are constantly laughing, and turning up their handsome aristocratic noses at old Mr. and Mrs. De Lisle and Miss Hertford, while they are as constantly availing themselves of the De Lises' carriage, when the Aylmers' aunt's coachman insists on sparing his horses, and of Miss Hertford's orchids when the Aylmers' fail. I consider the Aylmers the meanest of the mean in their impertinence."

"*Tout doucement*, my dear," remonstrated Lady Gosforth. "The De Lises and Miss Hertford ought not to tempt people, by letting themselves be put upon—I daresay they have their own reasons for it."

"I daresay," said Nanny, "and I suppose my manners have not that 'repose', which marks the caste of Vere de Vere." She was trying to overcome her hot wrath in vain. "No, I cannot think, with patience, of girls, who are so lost to honour and honesty, and so blind as not even to suspect it. They have hardly a penny in the world—at least, they think so; but I am told that, in reality, they have a modest little competence, which would be riches to far worthier people. But that does not signify, when it will not suffice to keep the Misses Aylmer in the perfection of

gloves, boots and pocket-handkerchiefs. These girls would not demean themselves, by attempting to work to increase their income, in any of the few ways in which they could work—not to save their souls, I was tempted to say. It is not the case of the steward who would not dig, because to beg he was ashamed, for they beg, after their fashion, with the utmost effrontery. They are prepared to depend on their unfortunate relatives and acquaintances, until the girls can induce some still more unfortunate men to provide them with establishments.”

“Where is the use of quarrelling with the world as it is?” inquired Lady Gosforth, shrugging her shoulders.

“Lady Gosforth, I decline to have my merits weighed by the houses at which I might have been seen, the horse I might ride, the fit of my boots and gloves,” and Nanny drew up her small figure—all nerve and verve—and looked like one of nature’s queens.

“My dear Nanny, you must accept the standards of your class, if you accept the class itself. But, I must tell you, that you are a young democrat, bristling over with prejudices, and not capable of making allowance for social obligations and weaknesses. I do not defend Betty Aylmer and her sister, and Madge Lascelles. The truth is that

they represent a kind of parasites and pretenders who adhere to the upper ranks, but are not truly of them—consequently they out-Herod Herod, exaggerate class faults, and, I am afraid, minimize class virtues. All the people round here are not like the Aylmers and Lascelles.”

“No, no,” cried Nell, in quick generous concession, “Mrs. Wentworth has been really nice, and there are the Summers—the late Dean’s family over at Harehurst—they are charming, Nanny is delighted with them, are you not, Nanny?”

“Yes,” said Nanny cordially, and then she qualified her assent by a rueful shake of her head. “But they live eleven miles away, and they are such busy people, for they seem to have taken the culture and humanization, or Christianization, of three parishes into their hands. I foresee we shall be sent to Coventry, Lady Gosforth, notwithstanding the friendliness and liberality of such people as the Summers, and in spite of your good offices, for which, believe me, I am grateful, though I may have done little credit to them. Do you know, Lady Gosforth,” Nanny spoke again on a sudden impulse, “you once made a remark to me, which I was surprised to hear, and have never forgotten, you said my father was—in some respects—the truest gentleman, at heart, you had ever known.”

"And I say it again, with all my heart," Lady Gosforth corroborated the statement without a moment's hesitation. "It was my poor boy Tom's opinion, and it has been mine from the first day I saw your father."

"Still, there is something lacking in poor Harry," reflected his zealous friend and patroness, as she drove back to St. Catherine's, much exercised in spirit by the injury the Newtons had contrived to do to their dawning fortunes, thus frustrating her painstaking efforts and clear-sighted warnings. "He must be deficient in the nice discrimination and fine discernment, with which his elder daughter is only too well endowed. It is like a thicker skin which has enabled him to bear the brunt of life's changes and struggles, with less suffering to himself, more manfully and cheerfully where others are concerned, than if he had possessed a different sort of cuticle. But will it stand him in good stead to the end, and will the poor man not get paid out for it, as we get for many of our so-called advantages, by being landed in the mire, to which thick-skinnedness tends? It is a great pity, both for himself and his poor girls. I wish I had not been detained in town, I wish Georgie Wentworth could have done something worth mentioning, but I suppose it was not in her, so no more need be said. Ah! well, I see,

plainly, how it will be! The Newtons will be let down to what is held to be their proper level. They will not be altogether expelled from polite society. Their faces may still be seen at omnivorous gatherings, county balls at which the company is apt to be a little mixed, huge promiscuous garden parties, coming of age festivities, which take in everybody, dinners before elections. But as for anything closer and more intimate, it will not be thought of, unless by independent unget-at-able outsiders like the Summers."

Lady Gosforth tried to turn her thoughts to some more agreeable subject than what was a genuine disappointment to her, but the disappointment was uppermost in her mind, and her thoughts quickly strayed back to it.

"As far as I can make out," she began again to reflect, on the same lines, "the only person in our set who stands by the Newtons, in a way, and will not let them go, is that *mauvais sujet*, their next neighbour, old Saville. There is an impression that it is not entirely in order to win Harry's money at cards and billiards, or to borrow it from him, it is with a view to one of the girls, and her portion, for his son, Captain Perry. It might not be such a bad arrangement, after all, as matters have gone. If they had gone otherwise, I should not have listened to it for a

moment, I should have done my best to prevent it, but, as it is, with their chances spoilt at starting, it may be worth while to take it into account. The Savilles are of a good family, and though Briarley has gone to ruin, it is not beyond being redeemed by a share of Harry Newton's money, together with care and prudence. Mr. Peregrine Saville would not treat his daughter-in-law as he treated his wife, and, even to her, his manner in public was not amiss, he had the instincts of a gentleman so far. But there could be no question of such a cruel risk for either of the girls, if young Saville resembled his father. They say he does not; that he is a nice young fellow, who has kept as much out of debt as could be expected of a man, whose father borrows from him, so I heard Colonel Wentworth say. The last sum of money they raised was entirely to relieve the old man. Briarley may see better days—I remember it, a dear old place, when I was taken there, as a little girl, in the time of this man's father. It is a pity that our old places should be allowed to fall down, and our old families to die out, though I have no doubt that little radical, Nanny Newton, would ask where was the loss? To have the one sister fairly well established so near her family, and a brother-in-law who could be trusted, would be an

immense gain to the other sister—be it Nanny or Nell—I should say Nanny; Nell is the more likely to marry of the two, for the very reason that Nanny has the better wits, the more character, the finer, more *spirituelle* type of beauty. There is no man in the carriage with me to read my thoughts, so that I need not apologize for my judgment."

It is not a pleasant nor an improving process, as a rule, to be sent to Coventry, and lowered to one's level. Nobody at Newton-Hayes liked the sensation, and Harry, especially, was the worse for it. He was already suffering from the want of a regular occupation, such as he had been accustomed to for more than twenty years. It had not been congenial at first, but it had grown a second nature to him. He was like Othello, with his occupation gone, by comparison, for he could only take a mild interest in the gardens and greenhouses, when he did not feel at liberty to thrust a spade into the ground, or to turn out a flower pot. The long walks of his youth lost their zest, when he had to make a business of them, and he was not so good a walker as he had been. He said his girls had spoilt him by making him get used to regarding their "toddlers" as walks. He had always detested driving. There was nothing for him save to loaf about

good deal, doze over his newspaper in the
ary, count upon lunch and dinner as events
the day, and take to making it of importance
at he was to eat and drink. He dropped in
on one of his tenants now and then, and in-
red after the crops and the live-stock. He
uld have swallowed a glass of beer, or a cup
tea, in any of the farm-houses, with pleasure,
the farmers and their wives were not at ease
h him. The more he was at ease, telling them
what he remembered of the sheep-runs and
h doings in Australia, and of his experiences
raising earlier cabbages and bigger strawber-
than his gardener could match at Newton-
yes, in his little garden at Paradise Row,
more his audience stared, and the less they
l in reply, till he felt damped in his simple
quence. Then, though their tongues would
wag on any other subject, they went glibly
ugh in recounting the farmers' grievances, and
uesting favours, which Harry found it difficult
question and deny in the circumstances. But
re was the Devil to pay with Westmacott, who
ie down on Harry, the next time they met,
bly deferential in tone—Harry hated people
be deferential to him—to carry off the agent's
ng implication that Mr. Newton was letting
self be imposed upon and plundered. What!

promise a new farm-stead to Wiggins, whose offices were fairly good and had been put in repair within the last couple of years? Undertake to replace the cattle Burrage had lost by rinder-pest and pleuro-neumonia, when the Government allowed compensation, and there had, already, been a sum deducted from the rent, to cover the loss! Of course, the Squire knew best what he wished done, and it was for him to say what he wished, but Mr. Westmacott was sorry to be forced to have a poor opinion of the tenants in question.

Upon the whole, Harry's greatest diversion was to stroll over to Briarley and have a game at billiards with Saville. The girls did not like the man, and he might not have been a saint, but who and what was Harry that he should judge? He owed much neighbourly kindness to Saville, a deal more than to those stuck-up specimens of country gentlemen around, who held themselves too good for a rusty colonial product that had been called on to earn his living for a score of years. Saville was an amusing beggar in his cynical way, and he had always a welcome for an idle, bored, old fellow. Saville would have a welcome to Newton-Hayes in return, so long as Harry was master there.

"I wish father would not go so often to Briar-

.....

ley," said Nanny, with the pained contraction which her brow took when she was vexed. She and Nell had been waiting in vain for Harry's coming into the drawing-room, to join them at afternoon tea.

"Has he gone to Briarley?" inquired Nell, a little listlessly, from the corner of the couch, in which she was nestling, by the side of the fire, which the early frosts were rendering acceptable. "I suppose he has," went on Nell, "for he went out soon after lunch and he stays longer at Mr. Saville's than anywhere else. He used to tell us when he went out," she finished, with a shade of plaintiveness. "That was when he had not much spare time, and when we knew how he was occupied for the most of the day. It is unreasonable of us not to recognize that there is a difference when he is his own master."

"Certainly he is not accountable to us for how he disposes of his time. That would be reversing the usual order of things," answered Nanny promptly.

"Nanny," said Nell, rising to take a chair close to her sister's at her wicker-table, and she sank her voice as if she were about to talk treason, "do you know I think—I am afraid Mr. Saville laughs at father."

"Mr. Saville laughs at most people and most

things, there is nothing too sacred for him," replied Nanny evasively, but though she sought to speak indifferently her face flushed in response to Nell's lowered voice.

"It is such a shame!" protested Nell, in a blaze of anger, which was very unusual with her. "If it were an honest, hearty laugh nobody would mind, and father would be the first to laugh with him. But it is with such a sneering malicious curl of his lip, under his moustache, while he is so suave all the time. Father is so good and kind, he thinks Mr. Saville is his friend and feels so friendly towards him. It is a shame!"

"Everybody's standard of loyalty is not so high as yours," said Nanny consolingly, "and I'm not sure that the standard does not decline as the social scale rises. It is a distinction to be able to be charmingly agreeable—apart from having an object to serve by your agreeability—and, at the same time, it is a feather in your cap to feel qualified to take off, to the life, the friend on whom you have been practising your amiability, so as to convulse a room full of company with laughter. It does not signify whether it is before your friend's face, or behind his back—the great thing is, to show how witty you can be at your friend's expense. I rather think, plainer spoken people, farther down in the social scale,

would call you to account for such behaviour, would apply to it old-fashioned bombastic names, such as 'treachery'—'perfidy!' But as for Mr. Peregrine Saville, I am of opinion it is a compliment to be laughed at by him. I am quite clear it would be no honour to possess his respect and esteem." She stopped for a moment, and then went on again hastily, "Perhaps we are not quite entitled to object to Mr. Saville's manner, if father sees all the time, as I think he sees, through the other man."

"What!" exclaimed Nell incredulously, opening wide her brown eyes, "and yet make a friend of him?"

"If father does not mind—there are things father does not mind—much."

Nell understood now and was silent.

There was a pause, while the girls sipped their tea and ate their bread and butter in the warm firelight. It lit up the drawing-room with a pleasant glow. The whole scene was pretty, with its old and new fashions, and its signs of the refined and cultured tastes of the two very attractive young women in the foreground.

Nell broke the silence this time, and, it must be confessed, there was now a shade of querulousness, as well as of plaintiveness, in her voice. "I think, Nanny, now that the weather is getting

colder, that Mrs. Williams might see that we had a choice of toast and muffins with our everlasting bread and butter. One would not suspect her of studying Byron, yet, surely, she must have read of his 'bread and butter misses' and thinks she is dealing with us according to our age, though really, we have out-grown the stage."

A comical light came into Nanny's gray eyes, and she laughed with natural merriment. "Do you know, Nell, I think we all of us are getting a little too fond of the good things of this life. Father, who used to find relish for whatever was put before him, looked exceedingly put out yesterday, when he discovered cook had committed the enormity of running out of anchovy sauce, and I caught myself feeling badly treated because there was too much lemon in my pet pudding. Do you remember, at Paradise Row, when you let the butcher's bill get beyond the average account and we had to retrench on fried liver, white herrings and rice and milk?"

"Ah! those were happy days," cried Nell wistfully.

"And these are happy days," said Nanny determinedly. "Look round you, Nell," and she glanced about her at the ideal room, and down at her own and her sister's comfortable, becoming frocks. "How much we have to be thankful

for! Our lines are cast in pleasant places. We ought to be as happy as the day is long, when we have got settled down and have conformed to our position."

"Ye—es," answered Nell doubtfully, "still, you will confess, it was mean in the Barrets not to invite us to have the honour of meeting the Princess? I should never have dreamt of being introduced to her, but I should have liked just to be in the company of one of the Queen's daughters, and to have looked at her from a humble distance."

"You may do that at the laying of the foundation stone of a convalescent hospital, or of a free library, or at the opening of a mechanics' Institute any day," said Nanny cheerfully.

But Nell, generally a contented soul, was inclined to air her grievances.

"And the Herons did not send us tickets to their private theatricals. I know it was a small affair—only a party of their cousins and intimate friends—but I never saw private theatricals, unless at school, and I was dying to see what they would be like, when grown-up people—men as well as girls—acted. I hoped, to the last moment, that we might get an invitation."

"Nonsense!" said Nanny, brusquely, "we are not their cousins nor their intimate friends."

"No, nor likely to be," said Nell dolefully.

"We have been at good theatres at home and abroad where we have seen the real thing," remonstrated Nanny, "and we shall see it many times again, I hope—that is a great deal better worth seeing than amateur acting."

"If it had been a charity concert or a bazaar we should have been invited—we can play and sing a good deal better than most of the girls here, though they had fashionable masters. And your little water-colour studies are more than passable." There was an unwonted bitterness in Nell's comment.

"Be thankful they are," said Nanny with resolute cheerfulness, "or let us be modest, and admit that they are no great performances, compared to those of the professionals, whose ranks I had once an idea of joining—and you objected strongly. But that was not what I was going to say, I meant to hint that the Lascelles and Barrets are surely at liberty to ask the company they prefer, and if they do not want us, we may return the compliment, and I say sincerely, on my part, we do not want them."

"But you will allow it is a little dull to be left so much to ourselves, and never to get nearer to our neighbours, who are having good times among themselves. At school we had the other

girls for friends and companions and we shared all their pleasures. Even at Foxchester we were not persistently left out of whatever gaiety was going on."

"I think you forget," said Nanny, "while distance lends enchantment to the view."

"Hardly anybody comes near father, except that odious Mr. Saville and the Vicar. He cannot give us up because we go to church, give to charities, and do our duty to the best of our ability. We have not broken half the provisions of the decalogue, like somebody we know, who is received in every house in the county, I believe."

"He is a county man, one of the county people, with a thousand and one ramifications and connections among them. They must let charity begin at home."

"You are so provokingly philosophical, Nanny," protested Nell tartly, reverting at once to her own current of thought. "The Vicar is not, strictly speaking, a county man. He springs from a race of clergymen and Mrs. Rendal's father was only a master in some school or other. They are not too good for us. I have not a word to say against them, and I try my best to be of use to them in the Sunday School. But they have so much to do in the parish that

with their unpaid tithes, their babies and his delicate health, they cannot be expected to show themselves very enlivening, poor souls!"

"You are getting too fastidious and self-seeking for anything, Nell," Nanny told her sister.

"I suppose I am," granted Nell, her forlornness merging into penitence.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN PERRY APPEARS ON THE STAGE.

MR. PEREGRINE SAVILLE took occasion to bring forward his son's name, with tolerable frequency, in conversation with both Harry Newton and his daughters. The old man of the world was not so left to himself as to attempt to play the part of a fond father, besides, he would not have regarded the *rôle* as good form. But he contrived to convey the impression that the young man was a person of some importance, that, when he came to Briarley, his presence was a decided acquisition to the society of the neighbourhood, and that, for special reasons, the master of Briarley particularly desired the company of his son and heir at this time. The wish did not seem to be reciprocated; Captain Perry resisted alike the temptations of the paternal partridges, hares and pheasants. He suffered his father to make up the number of his "guns"

without him. The young man did his shooting elsewhere. He was even guilty of abandoning his senior, to solitude and bills, at the festive season of Christmas. Captain Perry only turned up, with lagging steps, at Briarley, towards the end of the April which followed the arrival of the Newtons at Newton-Hayes, the previous midsummer.

Harry Newton, who was nothing if he was not sympathetic, had allowed himself, in the dearth of other interests, to get deeply concerned with the personality of the young man and to count on his arrival as a great event.

Nanny and Nell, with whom Mr. Peregrine Saville had made no way, in spite of his graces, which were indeed, in their unsophisticated eyes, the greatly-to-be-deprecated airs of an elderly Adonis and Satyr in one, took but a languid interest in the long-heralded, long-delayed arrival of the hero, who was of such decidedly undesirable parentage. The interest would have been slighter still, had it not been for the quietness of their lives, which weighed somewhat heavily on the less original and independent of the two girls.

There had been some talk of the family's going up to town in the course of the spring. But Harry had always hated large towns and London in particular, while he was still sufficiently floral

in his bent to render him unwilling to quit Newton-Hayes which he was just beginning to call his place, at the very time when nature was recalling her forces and putting on her first robe of beauty for the season.

Nanny and Nell had not urged the change. Nanny was the leader, and she had, in some measure, learnt her lesson from the disappointment she had experienced, in not finding a higher mental and moral standard, among her section of the Mountshire gentry. She began to fear that, even with the certainty of the picture galleries, the theatre and the opera, she would feel lonely in London as at Newton-Hayes, she would still be craving for that communion of souls, that infinitely wider, higher atmosphere, which had, so far, been unattainable. As for Nell, though she was not so opposed to stone and lime as her father was, and though she did not ask as much from her fellow-creatures as Nanny asked, she had not enough will to exert it against theirs. It was only at intervals that her sunshiny, contented nature was not pretty well resigned to those mortifications and deprivations, which went a certain distance in counterbalancing the advantages of Newton-Hayes.

Harry Newton, who had reached the point of being over at Briarley at some hour during most

days, was the person who brought the news, and aired it at the dinner table, that Captain Perry was, at last, "to hand." Harry announced further, with much empressement, that Saville was to bring over his son to lunch, on the following day; Saville had said "to call on the young ladies," but he—Harry—insisted on making an amendment on the proposal.

The girls were not entirely without curiosity with regard to the newcomer, and they were too good-natured and too fond of their father not to call up as much as they could command on the spur of the moment, that they might discuss, with proper animation, an incident which was evidently a matter of moment to the speaker. Nanny suppressed the remark which was on the tip of her tongue: "Had Mr. Saville turned bear-leader?" because her father did not like to hear sharp speeches from his girls. Nell made a hurried selection of an entrée in order to look over brightly to her father and ask, "Is Captain Perry—I wonder why people here always call him Captain Perry and not Captain Peregrine?—like his father?"

"My dear, this is his native place," Harry reminded her. "I daresay he was simply 'Perry' in the nursery and the school-room, probably at college too, though, in my day, our chums, if

they did not nickname us (Was Harry aware that he had been called "Nap"?) gave us our surnames, or some ridiculous play upon them. There was a poor fellow called Butter—the name of a good old Scotch family too, I believe—who was continually victimized in this way. He was "Fresh Butter," or "Butter in a pickle," according to circumstances.—No, I should not say Captain Perry was like his father; not so fine a man as Saville must have been, but in some respects," with a wary glance at the glossy black back of the butler—generally a stumbling block to true, social intercourse in his master's eyes, "in some respects. I am not sure that there are not people who would prefer the younger man—a nice sensible fellow, I should say—gentlemanlike, that goes without saying, and not such a martinet or haw-haw dandy, as your young military man is apt to be in piping times of peace, it strikes me."

The subject so bulked in Harry's mind that he talked to Nanny in the drawing-room later, on her seeing that Mrs. Williams was not taken unawares, on her making a point of everything "being as it ought to be, for Saville is a particular beggar, I can tell you. He submits to no omissions and puts up with no nonsense, however much his finances may be out of order."

This from Harry, who was once the most easily served man in England! The girls, even Nanny, were driven, in their turn, to make an event of Captain Perry's visit, and girl-like their minds dwelt on their morning dress and what would be best for them to wear at lunch. Their slender society experience had more to do with afternoon teas, evening parties, even big dinners than with lunches. But, certainly, their fresh spring frocks with their dainty frilling were good enough for a casual visitor, like Captain Perry.

As it happened, neither Mrs. Williams' credit as housekeeper and head cook, nor Nanny's and Nell's good taste and judgment in dress were put to the test, so far as Captain Perry was concerned. His father came without him, full of bland apologies for his son's unavoidable absence. The day was raw and misty, as April sometimes forgets herself so far as to be. The unpropitious weather ought to have been a trifle light as air to a young man, and a soldier, with an irresistible inducement offered to him; but, it seemed, Captain Perry's campaigns had quartered him, at some period of his martial career, in an ague-haunted region, which had subjected him to an illness, leaving effects on his constitution. He was, at that moment, suffering from such a racking headache, that not even the presence of two

charming young ladies could charm it away. Besides, it would be cruel to make the poor fellow appear at such signal disadvantage, in circumstances in which he would naturally desire to be at his best. Harry was so full of honest commiseration for the victim that the girls were not called upon to express more than the merest perfunctory regrets.

"Rather rude of Captain Perry, don't you think so, Nanny?" suggested Nell, with a pout and a disconsolate glance at a new girdle. "He might surely have borne a headache for the hour that lunch lasts."

"He would have borne it if his inclination to come had been stronger, I daresay, or he may not care to be trotted out by his father. But oh! dear, what a fuss about nothing—about some spoilt Adonis of a barrackyard not choosing to accept an impromptu invitation to lunch!"

"Father said he was a nice sensible fellow," objected Nell, reproachfully.

"My dear Nell, I hope it is not disparaging father's friendliness—rather the reverse—to hint that he is not very hard to please, and that his swans sometimes turn out to be geese." Nanny sighed as she spoke, for she was forced to admit, in her inmost heart, though she would not have readily owned it, even to her sister, that men of

Harry Newton's nature are apt to have a positive infatuation for geese in the guise of swans, in preference to the real article.

Though Captain Perry had excused himself from lunching at Newton-Hayes in company with his father, he could not, if he paid any heed to the most rudimentary politeness, get off from calling on the Newtons at an early date. He came by himself one afternoon, late, as it seemed to the girls, but not so late, if they had fully understood what fashion, with its whimsical dictates, enjoined, and he sat not longer than the regulation ten minutes. Harry was not in the house, and the girls had to entertain their visitor without assistance; yet, strange to say, they were not so ill-assured as he was, man of the world and of society as he might be supposed to be, in contrast with novices like Nanny and Nell. He was unmistakably put out in the matter of all the customary usages on such occasions, which ought to have been as common as the air he breathed, to him. He could not conceal a shade of reluctance, affront and unwillingness to have anything to do with the part he was playing.

Yet, as Harry had said, young Saville's face and manner were not without their recommendations. He was not handsome as his father had been, and still was, in certain lights. Captain

Perry would never look either supercilious or blasé. These were two items with regard to which he was, to one order of mind, greatly inferior to his respected parent.

But there was something trustworthy in the younger man's harsher, blunter features, in his heavier eyebrows, and fuller mouth under his light moustache. There was an intangible something in his looks, which implied that Perry Saville might be a gentleman in more respects than in those of an old name and graceful manners.

The expression of discomfort and ruefulness about the visitor yielded a little to the girls' simple, courteous greeting; and he half restively, half covertly, looked more at Nell than he need have looked, as at forbidden fruit, forbidden to him by his own decree, if not by the mandate of others, whose attractions he could not, strive as he might, altogether resist.

"What made the man so glum and absent-minded?" Nell asked, in unaffected wonder, of her sister, after he was gone. "He sat in that nice corner chair as if he were on the edge of a precipice. He asked twice if we cared for lawn tennis, and mentioned thrice, in different words, that we should have rain presently. Can he be a martyr to headaches? Is he habitually under their depressing influence? What a pity! What

a loss for a man in a profession like his! Even if his regiment is not called out on active service, I suppose he must attend drill and parade, which will be intolerable with constant headache. I am really sorry for him, especially as I do not have a headache above once in six months, and, generally, I have myself to blame for it. I have been sitting out in the sun or I have been wearing a hat which hurt me. Yes, it is a pity, for I think I should have liked him; he is a thousand times nicer than his father, if he had not looked so *distract* and bored—no, not bored, rather vexed—absurd as it sounds.”

“I think I know,” said Nanny deliberately, “I wonder if I should tell you,” and she lay back in her low chair and looked up at Nell standing near her, leaning against the window shutter. Nanny’s eyes, as she looked, held a mixture of fun, of consideration for Nell’s innocence, and of impatience with Captain Perry.

“Of course you ought to tell me,” cried Nell, rising to the bait, as when she was a little girl and dearly loved to have a secret confided to her keeping, “that is, if you have anything to tell, which I am inclined to doubt. Is there something wrong with Captain Saville? Have we done wrong in inviting him—but that was our father’s and his father’s doing—or in receiving him

when he chose to call, though we could not help ourselves, so that his high mightiness need not have been offended? ”

“Don’t be satirical, my dear,” Nanny recommended Nell, “leave that to me. It sits ill on you and you are wide of the mark. I think—remember I only think, I am not sure—that Mr. Peregrine Saville wished to exhibit his son, to bring him forward, ‘put him through his paces,’ he would say, as an eligible candidate; so much for Mr. Peregrine Saville’s wishes. As for Captain Perry, he felt he was showing himself in the character his father had chalked out for him, when he had to come over and call here, of his own free will as it seemed, while the whole proceeding went against the grain with him.”

“What nonsense you are talking, Nanny,” protested Nell in bewilderment. “Why should Mr. Saville seek to exhibit his son, to us of all people? What is he a candidate for? and what is the proceeding which goes against the grain with him? I wish you would not talk in riddles, or profess to be aware of mysteries which you could clear up if you cared to. It is not like you nor worthy of you,” ended Nell indignantly.

“Then judge for yourself,” said Nanny, goaded into being explicit. “Did not Mr. Saville say a good deal, and insinuate still more, on his son’s

behalf, the other day? Did not he bring back the conversation to Captain Perry's merits and exploits more than once?"

"Yes, he did," admitted Nell without hesitation, "and I thought the wish to speak about his son would only have been natural in another man who had but one child, and could not have him with him except at rare intervals. What surprised me was that Mr. Saville should be so engrossed with his boy. It made me think, Nanny, that we should not be too hasty and severe in judging people. It was like a sign that there was a great deal more goodness in the world, than we gave it credit for."

"I know where there is goodness and singleness of heart," said Nanny quickly. "But come, now, Nell, did not Mr. Peregrine Saville dwell persistently on his son's good qualities, and hint that his prospects might be more hopeful than was generally supposed? After his father had observed, with a soft sigh, that Perry was one of those general favourites, who was liked everywhere, in his regiment by his seniors as well as by his juniors, among his relatives and friends, did not the cynic grow almost sentimental when he wound up the gratuitous information to acquaintances of recent date, with the assertion that, after all, the lucky fellow deserved all the favour

that was lavished on him, for he had been a good son and had never cost his 'graceless dad' a moment's anxiety?"

Nell nodded. "Yes, he said all that, and father looked very pleased to hear it."

"I've no doubt he did. He likes to make the best of people, especially when he has taken a fancy to them; and I am sure he was much more sincere in his sympathy than Mr. Saville was in his pious gratitude for his son's virtues."

"But why should not Mr. Saville be sincere?" remonstrated Nell. "Why should he pretend to put a high value on his son's good qualities?"

"Because he wished to give Captain Perry an excellent testimonial, my dear."

"To whom? For what?" pressed Nell.

"Oh, my dear Nell, you are a great big goose," cried Nanny unable to restrain herself, "you are half a foot taller than I, and your shoulders are inches broader than mine, as they ought to be. Your hair is twice as luxuriant and your colour is bright and warm, altogether you are made on a grander, richer scale, yet you have not an ounce of suspicion in your whole bountiful body and gracious mind. Don't you know that you and I have quite respectable fortunes, as the daughters of Harry Newton of Newton-Hayes? We are not great heiresses, but

then what great heiress—who was not totally unpresentable otherwise and, in that case, there might be trouble with Captain Perry—would have anything to say to the son of a ruined spend-thrift, the heir of a stripped and wasted property, like Briarley? We are not to be despised in the circumstances. Father is of a good old Mountshire stock, though he and his father and grandfather before him came down in the world, and though the county looks a little coldly on him. We are not frights and oddities—we have been decently educated. Lady Gosforth has taken us up. Above all, our interest in Newton-Hayes would pay off the most crushing of the mortgages over Briarley—you might even buy me out, and then Newton-Hayes and Briarley would be thrown into one, and Briarley would rise out of its ashes—oh! yes, you would do very well for Mr. Peregrine Saville's purpose."

"Do you mean to say," cried Nell, opening great brown eyes of incredulity and scorn, and standing towering in her superior height above "little Miss Newton," "that Mr. Saville could have the coolness, the impertinence to sit at father's table, and, in his and our presence, recommend his son with such an intention?"

"I mean to say it," said Nanny with decision, "and it is better that we—that you—should un-

derstand in time. For there is another point on which you ought to be enlightened, if you have not seen it for yourself. It was for your benefit and father's that all the trouble was taken. You will not mind my saying that I am sharper than you, Nell, perhaps a little too sharp to be Captain Perry's wife and Mr. Saville's daughter-in-law, the elder man has a notion."

"But father would not hear of such a thing, he would not submit to such an indignity if he had the least idea of it," declared Nell, in much discomfiture. "I am certain he has no more comprehension of such an absurd detestable project—if there is such a project, and it is not a mere creation of your busy brain—than I had," complained Nell, half resentfully. "I should as soon suspect father of exhibiting his daughters and recommending them to possible suitors, like slaves in a slave market," she went on hotly, laying hold of the first striking simile, "as of his sitting listening to another man bringing forward his son in the same way."

"No, that is not a just comparison," denied Nanny, "father would never dream of making merchandise of his daughters—although I fancy it is possible for people, of the highest character and position, to display their daughters for the consideration of eligible *partis*, unless the use and

abuse of the London season are greatly belied. But you must know enough of father," continued Nanny speaking slowly, with evident unwillingness to enter on an explanation, "to be sensible that he will tolerate in other people what he would not do himself. He allows them a license which he does not claim on his own behalf. I can perfectly imagine his seeing through Mr. Saville's intentions and feeling more inclined—poor dear father!—to be flattered by them than to resent them, not that this implies he would do much to promote them."

Happily, as saving her from one of the painful doubts of her father's perfection, which she could not always escape, Nell's mind had travelled post-haste, during Nanny's speech, to another important consideration. "And do you mean the man—Captain Perry, or whatever he is called"—she cried in unwonted scorn, for she resented, even in imagination, having his name mixed up with hers, "knows? Oh, dear! Nanny, he may think we are falling in with his father's schemes, and are laying ourselves out to attract his attention. It's too hateful to be borne."

"No, no, I don't believe that," Nanny hastened to be fair, and to re-assure her sister, "I don't think he looks like a conceited fool, I don't indeed. But, if he guesses what is in his father's

mind, or if he is forced to hear it in so many words, he cannot help being conscious and feeling affronted by the part he is supposed to play—that of a common fortune-hunter. I think it is rather to the credit of his sense of honesty and honour that he has such a perception of the situation. All young men, in his circumstances, are not capable of it. I should say his world would not think the worse of him for carrying out his father's principles in this respect. I am clear that his disinclination and displeasure do him credit, though I could wish he would show more adroitness in concealing his annoyance. I desire to be impartial, but I confess I am under the impression that he might, and he ought to, keep his feelings so well in hand, that his innocent fellow victims should not see he suffers and be compelled to experience mortification in their turn."

Nell would not laugh, she would only regard the difficulty with vexed seriousness. It is dreadfully disagreeable, if you are right, Nanny," she asserted, sinking disconsolately into a chair. "I shall almost die with shame when I meet Captain Perry Saville again. I could wish that we had remained poor rather than be made marks for interested advances, which are little short of an insult, as if you or I would consent to be bought and sold to redeem a miserable place like Briar-

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ley—even if it were as prosperous as it is miserable—and to win the right of calling ourselves Savilles and being connected with that odious old man!”

“I am glad you have so much spirit, Nell,” answered Nanny. “Of course I endorse all you say, but we must take the evil with the good. You did not particularly relish being poor, and you would relish it still less, after you had tasted the sweets of affluence—none of us would enjoy the reverse.”

“I am not so sure of that,” argued Nell, still wincing and sore in spirit. “It is all very well to have a nice home and pretty things, with power to do what we like and to be kind to less well off people, but I don’t know that it altogether makes up for vexatious complications and horrible awkwardnesses like this. Father could not and would not forbid the Savilles the house, which would be the easiest way out of it,” suggested Nell with a troubled sigh.

“It would be rather an extreme step,” said Nanny, with becoming gravity.

“Then I don’t see how I—since you put the burden of the affair on me—can ever say a civil word to Captain Perry again. I feel as if I should always hate the sight of the man,” finished Nell, with spasmodic vigour.

CHAPTER XL

A DAY MARKED WITH A WHITE STONE.

IT was not in Nell's nature any more than in her father's to be implacable; Nanny came nearer to the possibility of it, but all the Newtons of this branch of the family were essentially good-natured. Even in Nanny's case her fine sense of justice and of her own infirmities of character, as well as of those of her neighbours, would have operated against a great crop of vindictiveness.

Captain Perry came again to Newton-Hayes in spite of the *mauvais quart d'heure* of his first visit, in spite of indignant rebellion against his father's cold-blooded, bare-faced project and his own dogged determination not to be a party to it.

After Captain Perry was better acquainted with Harry Newton and his daughters, the young man felt doubly disgusted with the mercenariness of the arrangement—the gain of which was to be

all, or nearly all, on one side. He even went so far as to call it, in his own mind, the Massacre of the Innocents; still, he let himself go again and again to Newton-Hayes—generally by himself, only sometimes in his father's company—though he had hitherto shown himself the opposite of a weak and wavering character. He had been considered, both by his friends and foes, as manly, in more lines than those of sport, and as well conducted, while neither a prig nor a kill-joy. He was widely known to be unfortunately situated, as the son of such a father, but as he faced his difficulties with unassuming fortitude, and did not add to them by a private crop of wild oats, he was liked and respected, as well as pitied, by those whose liking and respect were worth having. But, in spite of the worldly mindedness of society, there was a section of it whose approval would have been bestowed more charily, if the discovery had been made that Perry Saville was prepared to do a great deal more than play a son's part, in keeping a scape-grace of a father from being swamped, by his debts, in his later years. Filial piety, irrespective of the worthiness of its object, was distinctly to be commended, but it would be going beyond the province of filial piety for a young man to lend himself readily to audaciously mendacious schemes.

Nevertheless Captain Perry came to Newton-Hayes in full comprehension of the unfavourable verdict which might be pronounced on his motives. He could not resist coming, allured, as Nanny Newton had conjectured correctly, by an attraction which had met him on his first visit, even with his teeth set on edge by galled pride and a sense of outraged honesty. He had looked and looked again at what had captivated him, always in spite of himself, always as if he were not looking, because he could not trust his sincerity for the moment, because the good and gracious sight which won him, was marred and poisoned to him by the intervening ugly, base and sordid ends for which he was required to regard it. All the same, Nell Newton was the loveliest, most lovable girl he had ever encountered, and he must put himself in her way again, though he was altogether unworthy of her, though remembering what he remembered of his father's crafty counsels and machinations, it seemed to him he could never be anything more to her than he was now. It would be profanation for him to approach her nearer.

All this might be in Captain Perry's sensitive inner consciousness, but it did not prevent a great outward change in his speech and demeanour as his foot quickened and his eye kindled

in walking up the avenue, running up the hall steps, mounting the stairs which were to take him into the presence that was enthralling him. The stifling and paralysing stiffness, the harassed air of repressed annoyance and lurking affront dropped from him. They were but so many accidental and temporary rags and tags of the painful experience which belonged to his father's son. He stood, revealed in his true colours, a nice young fellow, pleasant, cordial, upright, all the manlier for the discipline he had undergone, possessed of plenty of common sense if of nothing exceptionally intellectual to distinguish him from the crowd. He felt, without acknowledging it to himself, that there were two sides to the question. It would have been contemptible, according to the best English notions—the English notions which are not emasculated and demoralized, but ring true in whatever rank of life—to follow his father's lead in calmly sitting down and taking an estimate of Nanny or Nell Newton's probable fortune, and then setting himself to get it into his hands, and, by means of the windfall, to repair the dilapidations of Briarley, and pay off the most clamorous of his father's creditors. True, he might resolve beforehand, that he would not be grossly faithless and cruel to his wife behind backs, as his father had been to his mother.

Captain Perry might even treat his wife with reasonable consideration and kindness, still, there would be the loveless marriage—loveless on his side at least—the mark of the beast, the stigma of mercenariness would abide. There would remain for himself the sacrifice of all that was most unselfish and tender in his nature, with the sacrifice from another of what she had a right to demand—the homage of his heart, the first place in his affections, the knowledge that she was the realization of his ideal. The blight of a deadly commonplaceness and prosaicness, however gilded, would rest thenceforth on his hearth and home, because of a union begun and finished, not in all that was sweetest and holiest in humanity, but according to the maxims of approved worldly wisdom.

Happily, there was quite another side. There was no degradation in being smitten, in every sense and faculty, by the best and most beautiful woman in the world. Degradation? no, there was exaltation in the fact. And so Captain Perry regained the dignity of his manhood and the control of his natural gifts, together with the mastery of circumstances.

Love does much more than laugh at locksmiths in removing mountains and destroying barriers, which, without its all-powerful aid, a man of

Captain Perry's honesty of principle and delicacy of honour could not have surmounted. To love, a fortune more or less, on either side, dwindled into insignificance. What was Nell Newton's fortune save the merest dross, in comparison to her priceless merits, in the eyes of her ardent lover? He loved her for herself alone—he knew it and she would know it, that was the chief thing. What could man ask more?

As for Mr. Peregrine Saville's plots and manœuvres, his son forgot all about them, except when they were forced upon his notice, and then he viewed them with astonishment no less than with repugnance, as if he had never before heard of such incongruous and revolting speculations. Good son as he was, he would glare at the grinning author of his being, until Perry Saville lost sight once more of all about his father and his grovelling aims, in the first rebound of the young man's mind to Nell Newton.

Love was playing the same tricks with Nell as with Perry; she had declared that she could not say a civil word to him again, that she would die with shame at beholding him, that she must hate the sight of him because of the mortification he had inadvertently caused her. She had made an amendment on second thoughts. She had confided to Nanny that, if a man, on whom she had

never wasted a thought, had been so silly as to lose his heart to her, and she had been compelled to refuse him, it would have been exceedingly disagreeable, but it would not have been so humiliating as to find another man recoiling from her because of his supposed need of any money she might inherit. The next worst thing to seeking her for it, was the only too palpable evidence of his drawing back from her on account of it, as if she set store upon it and was prepared to impute interested designs to any man who approached her.

But, as a matter of course, Nell had to say civil words to Captain Perry, and, as he kept coming to Newton-Hayes, she could not go on hating him. It would have been too tremendous an effort for a creature of so placable a disposition, so guiltless of arrogance and self conceit, as Nell was; nay, when she detected, with her swift womanly intuition, the love light which began to glow in young Saville's eyes, and flush his cheek, and to render him either mute or eloquent in her company, her gentle heart melted and relented entirely. With the unstinted trust and generous bounty of a royal giver, she began to pay him back richly in his own coin, to let her eyes fall before his, to be unable to keep her fingers from trembling in his eager clasp or

to withhold from him her softest tones and kindest words.

Was Mr. Peregrine Saville an odious old man? Had he impudently schemed to marry his son to one of the Newton girls in order to get hold of her money? Ah! what scandal was spread abroad, what slanders uttered. Who knew what temptations had beset the squire of Briarley or how even his regard for his son might act upon him as a last temptation? anyhow, no man was accountable for his father's sins, and poor Captain Perry was only the more to be pitied and liked because he had such a father.

Mr. Peregrine Saville saw it all with the greatest glee and triumph. He had snared his birds—one of them being his son—without the slightest trouble. He had feared some highfalutin and straight-laced humbug on that solemn young ass Perry's part, but there had been only the merest threatening of it to begin with, when straightway the boy had played into his father's hand.

Harry recognized signs with which he had been familiar when he was courting Lucy Bates, and they threw a morning glory and glamour over him as if he were courting her again, which helped to render him forgetful of everything else and to hold him passive, though the thought of

parting from Nell—"her mother's daughter"—when definitely realized, struck a chill to his heart.

Nanny saw what was going to happen at the very moment when she was least prepared for it. She could never have imagined anything serious coming out of the provoking *contre-temps*, though she had rather liked Captain Perry in spite of it. Now Nell was on the point of forgetting every detail in connection with that "odious old man," if she was not weak enough to transform him into an angel of light, he was made an argument in Captain Perry's favour. Nanny had always magnified the obligations of her slight seniority over Nell; she had felt for her sister, as she had hardly felt for herself, that Nell was motherless, that Harry, with all his eminently lovable qualities, was not the most desirable father for two motherless, brotherless girls. Nanny had been jealous over Nell and careful for her, in a way which she herself had often likened to a dragon rather than to a sister, one or two years older. This was in addition to the fact that the sisters had never been apart, and had been nearly everything to each other, so that the shadow beforehand of an interloper between them, who should part them, and usurp the best that the one had to give, which had formerly belonged to the other, without question, cost in itself a sharp

pang to the sister left behind. But Nanny tried to think what would be best for Nell. She shut her eyes and sought to realize what it would be to see Nell, in the perfection of her womanhood, a happy wife and mother. Could she—Nanny—not stand aside for that, look on and rejoice, be contented to care for her father and to be at hand as a referee for Nell, when her husband was not sufficient for her? And Nell would need all the backing and support which could be found for her, in an undertaking which undoubtedly had its arduous side. To marry the heir of a ruined man was no great marriage for Nell; but Nanny saw, quite as keenly as Mr. Peregrine Saville could see, what Newton-Hayes might do for Briarley, while the present master of Briarley would not live for ever.

Last, but not least, there was the advantage of near neighbourhood, if, as was probable, Captain Perry left the army and took up his quarters at Briarley. Nell would only go next door, as it were, and could be seen most days. Altogether Nanny could be magnanimous, she could let matters take their course as Providence and love willed, and not cloud this beautiful new crown of joy which had risen, as out of dust and ashes, to crown Nell.

Mr. Peregrine, Saville, in his satisfaction, resolved

on a master-stroke of genius to expedite matters before Perry's leave of absence should expire. He would make a public demonstration of the promising state of affairs, and call in every aid, kindred and social, to ensure his and his son's success, and to minimize the chances of any change of aspect on the Newtons' part.

Mr. Peregrine Saville's resources were limited, for the domestic machinery of Briarley was utterly crippled—except in the items which had to do with his own comfort. He did not care to apply to Perry in order to raise the wind and supply all that was wanted. The boy had such strange, methodistical, commercial notions about unnecessarily spending and paying for what was spent. It would not signify to him—what the elder man was convinced of—that no sane creditor in the universe would object to a small outlay, with the good hope of securing the heiress to a respectable fortune for the impoverished son of the house.

Mr. Peregrine Saville settled eventually to make the best of the means at his disposal, and he chuckled to himself at the very decorous, elderly-dowager nature of the result. The season was over for hunt breakfasts, he could not on any pretence—not even in honour of his fair neighbours—inaugurate a ball. But he could seize on a passing pretext for introducing an *avant courier*

of the garden parties, which waited for Midsummer to be put in force—a garden party, in the second week of May, with tennis for the hardier tennis players, a game of billiards for the older and more prudent guests, who dared not defy a spice of east wind out of doors, tea in the drawing-room, and in the library—as the mere mention of claret cup still sent a shiver down the backbone—mulled port and a *petit verre* or two, to temper the balmy breath of spring.

Briarley had, in the time of the present squire, lost, one by one, all its boasted attractions. It had, originally, been an older and finer place than Newton-Hayes, but its chief advantages had latterly mouldered, crumbled, and succumbed to the attacks of time and neglect. Its distinctions resolved themselves largely into the fine stacks of chimneys. The entrance hall remained, but the carved oak balustrades of the staircase, which had opened from it, and bestowed on it the finishing touch, had been removed, sold for what they were worth and replaced by a cheap and shoddy substitute. The pictures and ornaments, which were not absolute heirlooms, were gone long ago. The carpets and hangings were faded and threadbare. Every good tree in the park had been sacrificed at one time or another, and the larger part of the turfy glades was converted into graz-

ing ground for the sheep and cattle on the home farm. The fences and gates were not falling to pieces, but they had been replaced after a purely utilitarian fashion. The house stood like a wreck of former state and bounty, drooping and shrinking in the merciless exposure of its present inharmonious surroundings. The American garden with its rhododendrons, the Italian garden with its cypresses—the pride of bygone generations—were wildernesses. The rose garden, the delight of those ladies of Briarley, who had themselves long lain in the silence and darkness of the family vault, would have been a laughing stock, if its dwindling blossom and cankered buds had been presented, in their season, to modern rose-growers. The terrace in front and on the southern side of the house, was grown green with damp and decay, and displayed only broken balustrades, mutilated statues, fountains which had ceased to play, and a central sun-dial minus a nose. Nothing had been cared for and kept up at Briarley for many a year. There had been neither funds nor heart for restitution. The seasons, as they came and went, had been veritable destroyers. To invite guests to such a domain was like asking them to witness a commentary on riotous living, and the dearth which follows excess.

But there had been one thing which did not need to be kept up. There was a short part of the year during which the old forlorn gardens, whether walked in or seen from the terrace, could compare advantageously with the most carefully preserved and improved upon, the very choicest gardens of the neighbouring country-houses. Roses demand constant watchful tending and costly replacement, but what of the older fashioned families of the lily tribe, which prefer to be let alone, which flourish best in the shady, untrimmed, undisturbed borders of old gardens, in which everything else is running wild and degenerating? In fine Aprils and Mays, the time of the pear and apple blossom and the season of jonquils, narcissi—single and double—the Briarley gardens were still a sight to see, with their fields of living snow “warm in the sun rays,” and with yellow sheaves which were not grain.

Mr. Perigrine Saville had the good idea of inviting his neighbours, far and near—as a poor return for their indulgent fidelity to an old ally—to come and witness the modest old English glory of his spring gardens, and partake of the humble fare and innocent entertainment—all his broken fortunes would allow him to offer his friends.

Mr. Peregrine Saville did more, he enlisted the

good offices of a cousin, a Viscountess, who was down in the country for the Easter holidays at her Viscount's place, fifteen miles away. By urgent representations of the importance of the crisis in the family affairs, and appeals to kindred blood to come to his help in his last stand against adversity "for Perry's sake," he got her to consent to act as hostess, to preside over the mild festivities and carry them off by the countenance she bestowed on them. Above all, he trusted she would show an example, which all his good-natured friends, among the matrons and dowagers of the party, ought to follow, in the empressement with which, from the moment the family from Newton-Hayes were introduced to her, she would receive them and mark them out from the other guests. The bait of the studiously unassuming fête with its aristocratic hostess, was to be dangled before the Newtons' unsophisticated eyes, as an inducement to enter the family of which the Viscountess was an illustrious member.

The master of the ceremonies had also the good luck to catch Lady Gosforth, who was likewise spending her Easter in Mountshire, with her cousins, the Wentworths, and to find her more propitious than he could have hoped for his purposes.

Everything—even to the fineness of the weather—

went in accordance with the wishes of the originator of the gathering, and what a wonderful dream-like, enchanted day it was to the Newtons, especially to the girls—girls every inch of them! For the occasion even Nanny yielded to the spell. Suddenly they found themselves withdrawn from the cold shadows of the county, and promoted to the full sunshine of social popularity, as if they were the queens of the hour, with their gifts and graces all at once discovered, reckoned up, and made to achieve an incontestable triumph. At last the Newtons were placed on a level with the Aylmers, Lascelles, Barrets and ready to take precedence of them as Nell was so much lovelier, Nanny so much wiser than their competitors. The Viscountess, who was rather a personage in Mountshire, singled out the Newtons for her attentions, with charming frankness and naïveté. She was pleasantly cordial to Harry, she was absolutely caressing in her manner to Nanny and Nell. She kept them as much as possible with her, in what were, metaphorically, the “high places” of the scene, she would not consent to lose sight of them, following them as she did with the tokens of an accomplished hostess’s special favour. Miss Newton must join this tennis set, a “scratch” set, the best got up that morning, the Viscountess was sure Miss Newton was a good player. Miss

Nell Newton must not tire herself with wandering over the gardens, she must come and rest, and allow her Ladyship to have the pleasure of talking with her. Perhaps, she would like to see over the house by and by. There was not much to be seen at present, unfortunately, but one could judge of the capabilities. The Viscountess had heard Miss Nell Newton was a brilliant musician, and she could tell her of a delicious old spinnet—on which it was said Queen Charlotte had played—in the music room; and there was an ancient silver gilt cup which could be hunted for in the plate chest, it matched the grotesque salt-cellars. They were all heirlooms and curiosities of goldsmiths' work, dating further back than her Ladyship liked to say.

Lady Gosforth had always been kind to the Newtons, but she had never been so kind as to-day, when she took them under her wing, associated herself with them more conspicuously than with the Wentworths, presented them to the best people, made much of them, and let other guests see she made much of them, in her old-fashioned, brisk, friendly way.

Mr. Peregrine Saville hugged himself on this sign of attachment from Lady Gosforth. He was accustomed to say he lived like a hermit, but he kept himself well posted up in the news of the

day, particularly with reference to what happened in his circle. He was aware of something which concerned Lady Gosforth, with which the Newtons were unacquainted, which would not have struck them as of any consequence to them, even if they had heard it. The nephew of Lady Gosforth, for whom it was understood she destined the savings of her long dowagerhood, had come unexpectedly into so very large a fortune, that any bequest his aunt could make to him would be but as a drop in the overflowing ocean of his prosperity. It might be presumed that Lady Gosforth was too sensible a woman to waste the small fruits of her economies on a recipient who could not want them, neither did her other relatives want them. What was to hinder them from coming to the Newton girls?

Harry basked in the more genial atmosphere while he accepted it unquestioningly. He was soon the prey of the dowagers, for whom he was prepared to spend himself.

"I wonder if I was right in doing my best to keep him from fetching and carrying for them?" Nanny asked herself with some heart-searching. "There! I hear he has been undertaking to ride to Atherney one day next week, to take Mrs. Vane Garney's bracelet, with her very particular instructions to the jeweller. And father has

agreed to look in, at the same time, at the railway station, to see if Mrs. Barret's little nephews and nieces arrive with their nurses, and to put them into a safe fly, with a driver who can be trusted. I wonder, since her carriage is engaged, she does not propose him to have his waiting! Why do their husbands, sons and servants not go on their errands? Well, he enjoys it, and, perhaps I was wrong to seek to prevent it, for it might have been safer and better for him all round. It was my pride for father, I could not bear him to be a tame cat in houses, the masters of which are not half so true and good as he is."

Nanny could not deny that, to be properly appreciated, was agreeable, though she said it was too late, and it might be too dearly bought. She was quite aware it was something, which was in the nature of a well-bred, complacent bribe, on the part of the county administered to benefit members of their order.

As for Nell, how could she fail to be enchanted with everybody so kind? She was at liberty to stroll in that exquisite old garden with which, in this month of May, no modern garden could compare. She wore the pretty heliotrope costume and shady hat, the perfect taste and becomingness of which she and Nanny had taken such pains to insure, with complete success, as not her

mirror alone, but the eyes in which she could not look for more than three seconds, because they seemed as if they would devour her, told her. They were not bold, audacious eyes—far from it—they were reverent and humble. The owner of these eyes was by her side at every moment he could spare from attending to the rest of his father's guests. For that matter, both he and Nell frequently forgot the company around them, and were conscious of nothing save themselves. The two stood, and sat and walked, a blissful pair, alone, as far as they were concerned, in a blissful world.

"Oh! Nanny, it has been a happy day," Nell whispered to her sister, on their homeward drive. The communication was too sacred and sweet to be other than private and confidential. "It is like—only ever so much better—what I thought life might be like, when we came to Newton-Hayes."

Nanny was not surprised to hear it, she half expected to be told that Captain Perry had proposed and been accepted. She was satisfied that the act had only been deferred by some honourable scruple of the young man's, with regard to taking advantage of Nell being at his father's house, to speak words which would be sure to agitate her, which it would distress her

exceedingly to reply to, if, after all, he were doomed to receive an answer in the negative. For what honest lover, however favoured, is not doubtful of winning a suit, which, to win or to lose, is life or death to him?

CHAPTER XII.

MILES NEWTON FROM BRISBANE.

NANNY and Nell had dined together in solitary state the day after the garden party at Briarley. Harry Newton had gone from home, a rare event for him, and was to stay away over the night. He had accompanied the Savilles, father and son, to Aldershot, to witness a military spectacle, a great review, before a foreign sovereign. Captain Perry was interested in it, and he commanded facilities for enabling civilians to see it to the best advantage. Nanny was quite contented that her father should be under his guidance, as she would not have been if Harry had been making one in an expedition over which Mr. Peregrine Saville presided. "Captain Perry will see that it is all right," she said to herself vaguely, not without a shrewd perception that her prospective brother-in-law might be a useful relation, and a half amused sense

that she was counting on his services betimes.

Nell and Nanny had agreed to have their coffee brought into the drawing-room. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and Nell, whom Nanny had accused of a decided tendency to "mooning" within the last few weeks, prevented the curtains from being drawn. She was standing before the central long window, admiring the flood of silver light, and the fantastic shadows thrown by the fir trees on the lawn. Nanny was just on the point of asking her sister maliciously how long she was going to stand there, and whether she did not see a subtle connection between "mooning" and "spooning", when she was stopped by Nell's remarking abruptly:

"I say, Nanny, I see a figure—a man's—gentleman's figure turning out of the avenue into the gravel sweep, who can it be at this hour?"

"One of the servants, I suppose, and not a gentleman," answered Nanny carelessly. But, as she spoke, an assured ring at the hall-door bell announced that it was neither a servant, nor a servant's visitor, who was seeking admission.

Trifling as the occurrence was, the girls were startled. The knowledge that they were keeping house, for the night, without their father, all at once began to bulk largely in their minds.

Presently Harry's bugbear—proper, precise old

Braintree—the butler, knocked at the door and entered. There was a perplexed look on his round yet wrinkled face, and the slightest hesitation in his formal speech.

“A gentleman wishes to see Mr. Newton,” he addressed Nanny. “I asked him for his card, but he said he had not got one. I told him Mr. Newton was from home, and he said he must see one of the family. I have shown him into the library.”

“Do you not know who the gentleman is?” inquired Nanny, with what she felt, the next instant, was unaccountable and absurd trepidation. “Did he ask for Mr. Newton or for the Squire, or the master of the house?” she added in the same breath. The bright idea flashed across her mind that the visitor might be a travelling vendor of soap or steel pens, or an agent for a Charity, who chose, for reasons of his own, to call at an unseasonable time, and thought the chances of success in his application would be lessened if he told his errand to a servant.

An impenetrable expression replaced the perplexed look on Braintree’s rather stolid face, which had a broad nose, wide nostrils and a well-brushed up top of grizzled hair above his white neckcloth.

The imperturbable expression was that of an

experienced, well-trained servant, who was about to say something not according to his notions of propriety, for which, however, he was not accountable. "What the gentlemen asked, Miss, was 'Does Harry Newton live here?'"

"Not a conventional style of address," said Nanny, with a faint smile and a heightened colour.

"What a rude man, unless he is a Quaker," cried Nell.

"A Quaker would have said 'Friend Newton,'" objected Nanny, "but why should we stay discussing a stranger's manner of putting a question? Tell the gentleman I'll see him presently," and Braintree, whose curiosity had been roused and was not appeased, departed reluctantly on his mission.

"Don't go, Nanny," entreated Nell, "you don't know who the man is, or what he wants. He has no business to intrude into a house at this time of night."

"Nonsense, Nell, what harm could any man do me? It is barely past nine o'clock. He cannot be aware that we are two unprotected females, save for Braintree, since I have no doubt Edward"—naming the pantry boy—"has either locked himself into his pantry, or retired to the village, with the view of improving his mind at the Institute. I must not keep the gentleman waiting."

"Then you must take me with you," insisted Nell.

"As a protection?" suggested Nanny ironically, "well! you are a good deal bigger, but, between you and me, you have not the spirit of a mouse on ordinary occasions, I don't know what you might, or might not, do at a great crisis. My dear child, burglars do not ring the hall-door bell, between nine and ten at night, and inquire for the master of the house by his Christian name, before they begin their operations. The inquirer asked to see one, not two of the family."

"I don't care, I am going with you," Nell was obstinate.

"Then come along and overwhelm him," Nanny yielded, but she delayed going a minute longer. "I had an idea that it might be somebody from Foxchester," she stopped to say.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nell, in a tone of considerable discomfiture. The explanation had not occurred to her before, and it was not welcome, even to her good-natured friendliness.

"But when I come to think of it," went on Nanny, "I don't suppose it is. None of father's old acquaintances—even if they did not know what they were saying—would be likely to speak in that way. They might ask for 'Harry' or for 'Newton' but scarcely for 'Harry Newton'. I believe we were the only Newtons in Foxchester."

Thus far reassured, the sisters descended to the library, but though they had seemed to settle one point to their satisfaction, they were—Nanny, as well as Nell—conscious of labouring under an amount of repressed excitement. It would have been difficult to understand it, apart from a premonition of trouble, had it not been for the long-established quiet habits and regular hours of the family, and for the unusual circumstance of Harry's absence.

Braintree had lit a reading-lamp in the library, so that, when Nanny entered the room, she saw, not by the romantic medium of 'a dusky twilight' or a 'pale moonlight' but standing up, relieved against the lamp-light, a tall man in a travelling coat, with a cap in his hand, coat and cap in a style not quite familiar to her eyes.

He, on his part, saw before him two pretty, graceful young women in evening dresses—simple and suitable for home wear, but unmistakably evening dresses—which showed their round white arms encircled by a bracelet or two, and enough of their plump, fair, young necks, to afford a fitting resting-place for the gleaming necklaces which Harry had given his daughters on their first birthdays after he came into his inheritance. He liked to see the necklaces worn constantly, and so they appeared every evening.

The vision dazzled the stranger for a second, and caused him to stare in silence.

"You wished to see my father—I am sorry he is from home," Nanny broke the awkward silence, speaking courteously but a little stiffly, for the visitor's presence and pertinacity were more perplexing than ever. It was a relief to find that he was not a ghost from the past, out of harmony with the present, and out of season anyhow. But, if he was not Mayor Coppock, or Mr. Pring, or Bertie Coxe forgetting himself, who was he? He was not a traveller for soap or steel pens, he was not the agent for an hospital or a penitentiary. He looked too big, well-dressed and unconcerned for either of these *rôles*. He was not like a genteel beggar on his own account. He was not becking and bowing before the girls. He had not a travelling bag open, in readiness, to display his uncoveted wares; nor a memorandum book—the pages inscribed with testimonials and subscription lists—held in one hand, while the fingers of the other twirled a massive pencil-case—it might be of gold, or it might be of silver or even nickel, but it was bound to be massive.

Nanny's words recalled the stranger to his object in being there. "Yes, I was told so," he said, calmly, in a voice which had a slight ring

of authority in it, and was otherwise the voice of an educated man, accustomed to command himself and to be at ease in any company. "Harry Newton's daughters, I presume," and he bowed with perfect politeness, as the natural accompaniment to his words.

"Yes," answered Nanny, unable to escape a ludicrous recollection of Stanley's greeting to Livingstone. But she knew what became Harry Newton's representative and the mistress of the house, and she preserved her gravity. She had not to ask in return: "Who are you?" for she heard forthwith without the slightest circumlocution.

"I am Miles Newton from Brisbane, I landed in England yesterday," said the gentleman, in the most straightforward uncompromising, but entirely friendly, tone.

"Miles Newton?" repeated Nanny, in a bewildered way, and then she recognized that the inopportune visit had, probably, more complicated motives, and would doubtless last longer than she had anticipated. "Pray sit down," she said as civilly as she could manage to say it, in the midst of her incredulous astonishment. She took a seat herself and Nell followed her example.

Nanny could see that her sister was as thunder-struck as herself, else she would have been sure to have asked, with interest, if the speaker was any

relation of theirs, and to express her fear lest he should be very tired, after a railway journey on the back of a long voyage.

Nanny had certainly heard her father talk frequently of a kinsman named "Miles", who was with him, or, rather, with his father, during Harry's boyhood in Australia; she had heard Harry tell, in detail, what he remembered of the family connections, on the memorable day in the Coxe's office when Mr. Westmacott had brought the news that Mr. Coxe's senior clerk was heir to Newton-Hayes. But so far as she could recall the particulars of the conversation the "Miles Newton" there alluded to, though he was her grandfather's nephew and her father's cousin, had been as old as her grandfather, and must now, if he were alive, be more than three score and ten; more than that, she had a clear apprehension that he and his young sons had all died in an epidemic of fever, many years before.

These contradictions darted into Nanny's mind while she was conscious, without looking across the library table, that the man, calling himself "Miles Newton", was in the prime of life, certainly not more than forty years of age, strong and active-looking.

He was in the act of saying deliberately, as if he comprehended that his hearers had not accepted

his statement: "I am Miles Newton, your father's cousin once removed."

He did not look like an impostor. He was well, if plainly, dressed and bore himself with the unaffected freedom and independence of a man who respected himself, and was accustomed to be respected by his neighbours. He might not have all the conventional signs of a man born and bred to a superior social standing, but his whole aspect was that of a man of weight mentally and morally, a man of more than ordinary intelligence and worth.

Still, Satan will masquerade as an angel of light, and the race of impostors is by no means extinct. It was not yet a quarter of a century since the Claimant had gulled a credulous public. This so-called "Miles Newton" might, after all, bear a greater resemblance in his antecedents to Arthur Orton than to Henry Stanley.

Nanny rose to the encounter, she drew up her small figure and looked the very embodiment of a miniature magistrate. Transparent truth and right reason, were on her side.

"It is impossible," she said didactically. "There is some mistake. My father's cousin Miles would be a very old man if he were alive—as it is, he died in Australia many years ago."

"Pardon me, there is no mistake," said the so-

called Miles Newton, without flinching. "I am the son and namesake of the Miles Newton you refer to, I told you I was Harry Newton's cousin once removed." He reminded her with good humoured patience rather than defiance.

Nanny had not noticed the qualification, but it did not seem to signify in the general incorrectness of the assertion. "Miles Newton—the 'Miles Newton' I mean—left no sons," she said firmly. "His sons—there were more than one I believe—died in childhood, at the same time as himself, all of fever."

"Don't you think, Nanny, you must have been misinformed, father, or somebody, must have been misled?" interposed gracious Nell, speaking hurriedly and incoherently. She was distressed on account of hurting the stranger's feelings by seeming to doubt his word. "This gentleman ought to know his own name and origin—don't you think?"

The stranger was neither vexed nor put out. He looked half tickled, half touched, by beautiful Nell's disinterested championship—how disinterested she little guessed! Even Nanny had lost sight of any selfish grounds for questioning the alleged relationship.

"You are right," he said, addressing Nell specially, with a smile which lit up his somewhat lined face. "I am Miles Newton, while I belong to the younger generation. But nobody was

misinformed as to the facts of my father and my elder brothers' deaths, I was born later, after my father's death. My mother married again and I was brought up by my stepfather."

"My father never heard of your existence," urged Nanny, speaking in the plainest, most unvarnished terms.

"I daresay not, and it was neither his fault nor mine," replied Miles Newton quietly. "I understand your grandfather, who was my grand uncle, made some inquiries, but that was before I came into the world. There had been a coolness between the uncle and nephew, the original settlers, though I have reason to judge my father and your grandfather parted on amicable terms. My mother could not forget the coolness, she did not care to revive the intercourse by letter—local posts were not a very rapid nor a very secure mode of communication in the colony in those days—I can imagine she did not trouble to announce my birth while she was still in deep distress. Certainly, after she married again, she was averse to renew the intercourse with your grandfather. She was under the impression, I have come to the conclusion, that it was like applying to him for assistance on my behalf, whereas my stepfather was ready and willing to charge himself with my maintenance, and to launch me in life."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RAILWAY MAN AND HIS ACHIEVEMENTS.

NANNY was staggered, each explanation sounded possible and natural, and was so far corroborated by what she had heard her father mention, that they could not be deliberately-concocted falsehoods; but were they cunning inventions made, on the spur of the moment, to fit in with what the speaker knew of the family history?

Nell was sitting, evidently very uncomfortable and unhappy. It was dreadful, to her mind, that she and Nanny should behave in this very distrustful and unkind manner to a cousin—even if no more than a second cousin of her father's, still he might be his nearest surviving relative after his daughters. She had a notion that the hospitality of the bush was unbounded in its patriarchal simplicity, and here was this gentleman, just landed in England, come straight to his

kinsman's house and hardly invited to sit down in it! Yet how could Nanny and she, who were all alone, and were not even sure that he was the man he said he was, bid him take up his quarters with them.

He seemed to see their dilemma without resenting it. He rose and said, "I shall come back to-morrow, when your father will be at home—your servant said. I ought to apologize for intruding upon ladies at this hour, but I thought I had better leave a message with you, for Harry Newton, and so announce my arrival at least. Perhaps you will be so good as to tell me, what train stops at your little station, which will take me back in a direct or round-about line to Millthorpe, where I had lunch. I am an experienced traveller, well used to knocking about," he added, with a cheerful philosophy, which had a benevolent purpose under its nonchalance. "Let me wish you good evening." He made a movement as if to shake hands, and then checked himself with a doubt, which clearly struck him in an almost whimsical light, whether his cousins might not object. "Poor young souls!" he was saying to himself compassionately, "one of them, the little one, apprehends danger of some kind, and she is ready to make a fight for her father."

Then Nell took the initiative, and waived aside

the slight motion of the strong supple hand towards her and her sister, she rose in agitation while she stared hard at Nanny beseeching her for her support.

"There is no train stops at Hayes station before the seven o'clock train, to-morrow morning," she said with a gasp of distress.

"Then I shall walk to the next station," said Mr. Miles Newton composedly. "Lucky it is a fine night, none of the drizzling fogs I was prepared for."

"The next station is twelve miles off," Nell shot out the words with an agonized jerk, still staring at Nanny.

"Twelve miles on macadamised roads are a bagatelle—a little gentle exercise for a fair walker," he tried to reassure her smilingly.

"But you have had nothing to eat since lunch" cried Nell, "you must be quite faint, we have just dined, but that is of no consequence," and she looked again at Nanny with urgent entreaty and keen upbraiding.

"Don't worry, I am not given to faintness," said her cousin, with another of the frank smiles, under the influence of which, what was hard in the muscles of his face relaxed agreeably. "To fast from a good luncheon to a good supper is nothing, to a man who has tramped all day in the bush on a lump of damper and a can of tea, without cream or sugar."

"That may be, but my sister is right," said Nanny, recovering her speech and at once deciding the question. "You must allow me to send in a tray here with whatever you care to take."

"Thanks, I do not care to take anything," he said, with equal resolution, like a man accustomed to have his way, "unless you will be so good as to give me a cup of tea. It requires no great insight to predict, beforehand, that it will be an improvement on the bush tea I have been accustomed to brew for myself, of which I was speaking."

She could not refuse him the tea or their company, which she was sensible he had bargained for, while he drank it. She rang and ordered the coffee, for which she and Nell had been waiting in the drawing-room, to be brought, with the addition of tea, into the library.

This was still farther to the mystification and pique of Braintree, who knew nothing of the claim of kinship proffered by the stranger.

Notwithstanding the repressed excitement and displeasure of Braintree, who considered himself in a measure responsible, in his master's absence, for the breach of propriety, the party of three thawed a little under the spell of the cup which cheers but does not inebriate. Nanny could not fill up the intruder's cup and Nell could not suffer him to

hand her a biscuit without feeling a little less strange and embarrassed, a little more friendly. He, on his part, was not unwilling to enter into conversation. He spoke well as he told, with what was simply natural eloquence, the effect the first sight of England had produced on him, and contrasted a highly cultivated, shut in, nice place, like theirs of Newton-Hayes, with the great stretches of untenanted, unenclosed land, well nigh as free as the sky above it, to which he had been largely accustomed. Some of his personal history, which he had evidently no thought of concealing, came out in the course of his talk. He was unmarried. He had not even a half brother or sister. His mother and stepfather were both dead. Yes, his profession was naturally a great deal to him—it was that of a civil engineer. He had projected and carried out several lines in the Colony. He had also acted as their pioneer in some quarters. He had travelled, with one or two companions, for many weeks at a time, on what sounded more like daring adventures, than mere hardy enterprises, in traversing great tracks of the vast continent. He was perfectly unassuming in his narrative, and never made himself the hero of his tale when he could help it. But even a couple of tyros could see that this was a man endowed with

exceptional activity and originality of mind, and force of character, a man fit to carve out a career spontaneously, involuntarily, almost without planning or thinking of it, a man whom other men, moving in the same groove, would listen to, defer to, and trust.

This big brick-red man was thoroughly unconventional, but it was evident enough that he had cultivated himself to the best of his opportunities. He could not be called a rough diamond, for there was no roughness about him, though he was simplicity itself. He had a gift of unstudied eloquence—which he had often not been able to exercise, for long intervals—all the more, like most people who speak easily and well, and are not cursed with self-consciousness, he liked to speak to a fit audience. He was pleased by the interest with which Harry Newton's two beautiful young daughters listened to him, though he was a man of forty, and they were girls barely in their twenties. He had the singular freshness and ready receptivity of faculty, which, when found at all, is mostly met with in men who have led more or less solitary lives and have been continually thrown back on nature for companionship. He impressed others, because of his own susceptibility to impressions. This was due to the survival of a plasticness of mind and capacity for

being quickly arrested and keenly interested—to the point of enthusiasm, which one is more wont to associate with the exuberant vitality of youth than with the sober sedateness of middle-age.

It was on this one side—of an abiding vein of youthfulness—that there was the slightest strain of resemblance between Harry and Miles Newton. And the strain was exhibited in forms, so widely contrasted, that it was only intimate knowledge of the two men that would serve to detect what might mean a germ of heredity derived from squire and yeoman forefathers, common to both, and, meanwhile, turned in nearly opposite directions.

There was no outward likeness between the cousins, perhaps it would have been unreasonable to look for it, in comparatively distant relations who had passed through very different experiences. Both men were well grown and well looking, Harry being decidedly the handsomer on the surface. The growth of the younger was that of muscle and sinew, strung to the utmost tenseness consistent with elasticity; and the growth of the elder was the large-framed, amply-nourished, goodly bulk of a sound body, in which dwelt a tranquil mind. There was no waste from worry or overwork or a self-imposed burden of responsibility on Harry's part. Lately there had

not even been the check of sufficient exercise and constitutional temperance, with the compulsory avoidance of over-indulgence in the good things of the table, to lessen the tendency to over-growth and its resulting unwieldiness. Harry Newton had been in his youth and early manhood, a fine animal, from the animal point of view, but if he did not take care, or if some drag were not applied to him, without his will having anything to do with it, in the course he had entered upon, he would soon be a fine animal no longer.

Miles Newton's good looks, though there was no strong objection to be made to the tolerable regularity of his features—his good nose, his not so good mouth, his hazel eyes, rarely without an element of intentness in their gaze—belonged largely to the manly worth, honest candour and restrained power in every lineament. He owed nothing to colouring. Between much exposure to an Australian sun and the salt breezes of his recent voyage, his skin was not far removed in tint and texture from the copper or brick-red which marks the aborigines of the mighty island of which he was one of the latest products.

Harry Newton's handsome elderly face (very unlike another elderly face, evilly handsome, in whose company Harry's was often seen) had always shown the perfection of moulding and

colouring, delicate, not with waxen delicacy, but with the healthy peach-bloom of Nell's complexion.

"Nanny, what is your opinion of him?" asked Nell, breathlessly, after the visitor was gone and the sisters were together in the drawing-room again. "If he is our cousin, of which I suppose there can be no question, don't you think he will be a great acquisition, when he is in this country, for I am afraid he will not stay long in England. I call him very clever and agreeable and so nice in not showing up our—I should say my—ignorance, and so good-natured in taking the trouble to enlighten us about the antipodes. Father will be delighted, and I do think Captain Perry will like him. Won't the new cousin be an acquisition?"

"I don't know, I can't say," answered Nanny, still with a startled, abstracted air.

"Why, Nanny, you don't mean that you doubt him, that you don't consider him a gentleman?" remonstrated Nell.

"Of course he is a gentleman, and a good deal more than a gentleman," answered Nanny, waking up to the remonstrance and speaking impatiently. "He is a man in his strength. It was good to listen to him, as one only feels when there is something both of goodness and greatness in the speaker. I am sure that man

has done wonderful things, though he spoke as if they were the most ordinary doings in the world."

"Well, you know, after all he is only a 'railway man' and pioneer—whatever that may be," objected loyal Nell, beginning to feel jealous for her soldier.

"And I think," maintained Nanny in her unusual excitement, "that a man may be said to have done wonderful things, yes, and beautiful things, who has opened out paths in the wilderness, made room for the crowded-out dwellers in the great cities and the old countries, and brought prosperity deserving of the name, with all the joy of human intercourse, to outlying isolated log-houses far in the rolling plains. I don't know that any one of the old English Newtons ever did half so much for his fellows. The family had to go to the ends of the earth and be squatters, pioneers, and 'railway men' before they could develop into public benefactors. It struck me in listening to Mr. Miles Newton, that, in a man of this kind, you do not ask if he is a gentleman, because you know he must be, unless your notion of gentle breeding is of the most conventional, artificial kind. I should not be astonished if he were one of those men of whom the old prophets and seers said, that, beginning poor and obscure, their place is with princes before they die."

"I am so glad to hear you say so," cried Nell,

carried away by Nanny's fervour, coming round to her opinion and speaking in perfect good faith. "Do you know what I was thinking, when he was talking? He was full of his subject, his heart was in it, anybody could see, yet he was not too much engrossed with it to have eyes and ears for other people's hobbies. He did not fail to admire our library, with its alcoves, its fine editions of standard books and its rare old prints. He looked so manly and strong and yet sympathetic, ready and fit to be depended upon. What I did think was, how charming it would have been if he had turned out to be an unknown elder brother instead of only a cousin."

"Ah, yes, if he had but been a brother, and not a cousin," acquiesced Nanny with unexpected empressement and a long-drawn sigh. Then she laughed and protested with equal impetuosity, "What nonsense we are talking, Nell. The man is not so very much younger than father, I imagine there is not more than twelve or fifteen years difference in their ages—though he, too, looks one of those people who will never grow old. And how can we desire him for a brother, when we have not spent an hour in his company? He may have the worst temper in the world and be the most difficult person to live with, even though he is neither knave nor fool."

CHAPTER XIV.

MILES NEWTON'S CREDENTIALS.

HARRY NEWTON could not believe his ears when, on his return home, his daughters poured into them an account of what had happened the previous evening. He was a man slow to receive an idea or to follow up an argument. Of course it was just possible that his cousin Miles had left a posthumous son, though Harry's father, in another part of the Colony, had not been aware of the fact. He had not then amassed the fortune which had melted away as quickly as it was heaped up. He had been too much engaged and troubled about his own affairs, to institute very searching inquiries after his nephew's widow, though he would have done his best to help her if she had been within his reach. Later, when he heard she had married a second time, and that fairly well for a settler at a new station, he had dismissed her from his thoughts, while their paths in life had not again crossed.

So far Harry had pursued the record of the past without any foreboding of disaster, but by degrees another consideration stole in upon him, and brought with it an amount of agitation and dismay, strange to a man of his calm temperament, who had hitherto declined to be elated by the smiles, even as he had, with the same easy philosophy, disarmed the frowns, of fortune. He had been happy enough before he was summoned from one sphere to another. He had not sought out his prospective inheritance, or felt as if he coveted it or wanted it very much. He had not found it a bed of roses after he got it. But that was quite another thing from being required to relinquish it, at a moment's notice; from being called upon, for a second time in his life, to renounce the habits of a man of position and affluence, and to resume toil for daily bread. He had learnt the acquired habits, with the sloth and self-indulgence they may entail, more thoroughly during the last twelve months, than he had done in the six or eight years, when he was a rich colonist's son, in his youth and early manhood. Yet, at whatever cost, the truth must be recognized. If "Miles Newton from Brisbane" was, as he had represented, Harry Newton's cousin once removed, the son of the first Miles Newton and the grand-nephew of Harry's father John, the new-comer

was the descendant of the elder branch of the Huntingdonshire family, and the heir of Newton-Hayes. The estate which had gone a-begging had journeyed in a wrong direction.

Under the sharp pricks of the alarm which had seized on him, Harry did about the wisest thing he could have done, under the circumstances. He sent post-haste, not for his friend Mr. Peregrine Saville, but for the old family lawyer, Mr. Westmacott, before Miles Newton, if there was a Miles Newton who was a second cousin of Harry's, could reappear on the scene.

It did not require half a dozen sentences, far less a score of idle exclamations following on a nervous groping in the fog of early recollections, to arouse Mr. Westmacott to the significance of the incident.

"Good heavens! my dear sir, Mr. Miles Newton, if he is not a man of straw, is the great-grandson of your grandfather's elder brother," cried the lawyer, wiping his forehead, though the day was not hot, and frowning heavily. He had been much gratified by his own discernment in discovering, in Harry Newton, a clerk to a solicitor in Foxchester, the heir to Mr. Westmacott's former patrons at Newton-Hayes. He had regarded the discovery as a well-deserved tribute to his skill as a genealogist, and hunter-up of the missing

links in a pedigree. He felt his professional honour touched, his legal character impugned, by the starting into life, at this date, of another and a rival Newton, of whose existence Mr. Westmacott had not so much as heard, though he was quite cognizant of the life and death of an elder Miles and that he had issue in the persons of the little lads who died along with their father. But who and what was this younger Miles, this undreamed of, unsuspected son of the dead man, if there was any truth in his story?

Apart from Mr. Westmacott's natural partiality for his version of the succession, apart also from his sincere liking for this man, the squire in possession, who was a good fellow, though somewhat trying in his amazing simplicity, the revelation was a severe blow to a highly respectable professional man—to whom to make a grave mistake in his deductions, so as to mislead grievously a client, an innocent man, was gall and wormwood.

"Do you mean," said Harry, asking in a dazed, stupid tone, a question which he had already answered for himself, "that my cousin's son can turn me out of the property here?"

"I am afraid he can, sir, if he can prove that he is your second cousin," said Mr. Westmacott, almost testily, in the depth of his sympathy and vexation. "But if there has been a serious wrong done,

if there is disappointment to face, and trouble all round, who is most to blame for it? I put it to you candidly, who would expect that a man should be in complete ignorance of the very existence of another man who was, as it happened, one of his nearest relations? What could have possessed your father that he did not make the future secure by tracing, beyond mistake, his nephew's fate and whether he left a child? But it is always the way; one would think the people who are responsible are criminally, yes, criminally careless, on purpose to leave those who come after them at a disadvantage." Then Mr. Westmacott cooled down a little and was heartily ashamed of his petulance. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Newton, you must excuse an old servant of the family. I'm a hasty-tempered old fellow. I'm speaking of the divisions of Australia as if they were so many English country parishes. No doubt the individual, who is upsetting all our beliefs, is some adventurer who is following up a mare's nest. He need not be a rogue, he may only be a simpleton, some other Miles Newton—neither of the names is very uncommon—with whom you have nothing to do, save that he has heard of your English inheritance, and has talked himself and other people into the conviction that he is of the same stock. He must produce

evidence, and show his papers, before we are bound to pay any heed to his tale."

Mr. Westmacott was still speaking, when the hall-door bell rang, and Miles Newton was shown into the library where Harry and the lawyer were holding their consultation.

After one keen glance at the stranger the agent's face fell once more. This was no simpleton, neither had he the physiognomy and bearing of a rascal. He and Harry confronted each other for an instant in silence. If there is any mysterious stirring of kindred blood when parents and children, brothers and sisters who have grown up strangers to each other, meet for the first time, the movement cannot be supposed to extend to second cousins. Both of them knew perfectly the important item in the asserted relationship (of which Nanny had only entertained a faint conjecture the previous evening, while Nell was in blissful ignorance of it) that they were opposing claimants for the possession of Newton-Hayes. They had each the man's instinct, Harry of keeping what he had got, Miles of asserting his right—his prior right—to the house and lands of their common ancestors.

After the single instant's pause, when he had kept his hands in his pockets, Harry's habitual urbanity gained the victory over his dogged dis-

like to the whole affair. "On the chance of your being my cousin, sir, as you say, and no doubt believe, you are," Harry spoke politely but stiffly, "I am bound to give you a friendly greeting and welcome."

Miles Newton took the hand—grown soft and white—which Harry offered in his firm strong fingers without a second invitation. "I am your cousin, Harry Newton, and if I had not come in a friendly spirit and in fair fight, Newton-Hayes would not have been my first destination after landing in England. I might have put the machinery of the law in motion without giving you warning beforehand. I might have kept you in the dark, to the last moment, as to the proofs I had to establish my claim. On the contrary I am prepared to lay them before you."

On Harry's formal invitation Miles Newton sat down, with the master of the house and the man of business, at the library table, took out his pocket-book, spread out its contents, and as far as his companions could judge, proceeded to speak in the most straightforward manner. He told how he came to know of the death of the last Newton of Newton-Hayes, in the direct line, from a chance paragraph in an English local newspaper, which he happened to look over. The paragraph not only mentioned that

an heir had been found in the person of a Mr. Harry Newton—who was in a lawyer's office in the market town of Foxchester, and had been unacquainted with what was in store for him—the writer gave a summary of the links by which the heirship was established. He traced the Mountshire squires in their ramifications as Huntingdonshire yeomen and Australian squatters. This announcement had put the son of an Australian squatter, whose name was Newton and who was not entirely ignorant of his antecedents, on the scent. He showed what evidence he had in his possession and what further evidence he could bring forward to corroborate his words. He could produce the certificate of his baptism under his father's full name. The officiating clergyman was dead, but he could summon witnesses who would swear to his hand-writing.

From his mother, Miles Newton had learnt many details of the emigration of the elder Newtons which nobody, unconnected with the family, was likely to know. He had, with his luggage, a family Bible, which his father and mother had carried with them to Australia, which, apparently, they had not liked to leave behind them when they removed from one district to another. On a fly-leaf within the boards, there was written, according to an old custom, a record of the

births, marriages and deaths in the family, beginning at a date two hundred years back. (A piece of information over which Mr. Westmacott pricked longing antiquarian ears.) The style of "Newton of Newton-Hayes" was that given to the owners of the first four names. All had been written by the bearers of the names, in the hand-writing of each, and inserted in due order.

So much for what was actually in Miles Newton's hands and carried full conviction to himself. But, as he observed quietly, there remained the possibility to others that he might have purloined the papers and stolen the Bible. He might not be the Miles Newton descended from these progenitors. He therefore gave several addresses to which he proposed Harry Newton, or his lawyer, should telegraph, in order to gain further information. One was that of the manager at the main office of a great engineering centre, another was that of the chief magistrate of the township in which he, Miles Newton, had been born, where his step-father, Alfred Arkell and his wife, Miles Newton's mother, had dwelt for many years and where they had ultimately died. A third was that of the firm of bankers with whom Miles Newton dealt, a fourth and fifth were those of well-known business men in Melbourne and Sidney, cities with which Englishmen might be better acquainted

than with the rising local towns. It amounted to this, Miles Newton was willing that Harry Newton or his agents should telegraph or write to any quarter where the speaker was likely to be known. He was pretty well known in various districts of Australia, he said modestly, while he craved leave, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, to remind his hearers that Australia was not England.

Miles Newton showed himself more ready and willing to submit to any private, personal cross-examination than Mr Westmacott, far less Harry, was prepared to start it. Like others, in their situation, they were disposed to reserve their questions to a more advanced stage of the contest.

The next gratuitous proceeding on Mr. Miles Newton's part was to point out, with perfect frankness as it sounded, what was lacking in his chain of proof, and what he proposed to do to supply the deficiency, if an easier method did not present itself. Apart from the record in the Bible, he had not any attestation of the baptisms and marriages of his father and grandfather, the latter of whom was Harry's uncle. He—Miles Newton—had been told by his mother that some family papers had been left by her first husband in charge of John Newton, when John's nephew had quitted Red Rock Falls for good and all.

Miles Newton stopped at this point and looked, with a direct appeal, at Harry, who was unable to keep a strain of sulkiness out of his voice in his answer that he knew nothing of these papers. He had still in his dressing-room an old travelling-trunk which had always been supposed to hold some of his father's papers. He had lugged it about with him, much as the relatives of the gentleman, to whom he was speaking, must have lugged their family Bible. The trunk had first reached him when he was on the eve of leaving Oxford, after the crash at Red Rock Falls and his father's death, some thirty years before. He had made a cursory inspection of the contents of the trunk on its arrival, when, to the best of his recollection he had found them to consist of old accounts and business letters, which were of no use to anybody. He knew he had kept the trunk with its contents intact—for a silly enough reason—simply because they had belonged to his father.

Miles Newton resumed his statement without betraying either surprise or disappointment. If the papers had happened to be irretrievably lost or accidentally destroyed, he said coolly, he had still the pages in the Bible. By the way, he would say—in connection with the reflection on his parents for having burdened themselves with

the Bible, a heavy folio, as he could bear witness, while they left behind papers which were of consequence to them—that was a choice pretty certain to be made, especially when there was a woman in question, a sentiment of reverence—some people might call it superstition—would cause her, in departing for a new home, to cling to the family Bible whatever else she left behind. The difficulty was that though the dates of the births and marriages were carefully given, there was an important omission which he had been told occurred occasionally in these amateur jottings. By a curious abridgement, the places where the baptisms and marriages were solemnized, and the names of the officiating clergymen, were not supplied.

“You are right,” said Mr. Westmacott, with professional emphasis, “that omission is not uncommon and it is a grave flaw; in fact, in a legal point of view, it goes far to invalidate the whole document—supposing it could be established otherwise.”

“Still, you will allow the presumptive evidence,” said Miles “and you will grant that to have the exact date is an immense help in instituting a search through the various parish registers,” he finished with the sagacity, which Mr. Westmacott admitted despondently, looked out of the deep-set

wide apart eyes, fixed upon him. "I don't anticipate any great trouble in getting the certificates relating to my grandfather's baptism and marriage and that of my father's baptism, for I have ascertained their branch of the Newtons—your branch also," inclining his head to Harry—"were then yeomen-farmers in Huntingdonshire, somewhere near St. Neots. It is the certificate of my father's and mother's marriage which may require some hunting up. They were both of them country born and bred, but, for some reason, they chose to be married in London, where my mother had well-to-do relatives. I think my father was even then thinking of emigrating, and wanted to be making inquiries at different agencies and offices quite as much as to be having a holiday. The couple stayed in town the requisite time for the purpose of the marriage. My mother was greatly taken up by her first visit to London, and was carried here and there by her friends to see the sights and have a taste of the gaieties, which did not tend to lessen her natural excitement, under the circumstances, and the bewilderment of a country-bred girl suddenly plunged into the noise and whirl of a great town. I think it was these disturbing influences quite as much as her failing memory which, by the time she spoke of her marriage to me, prevented

her being able to give a clear account of the locality of the great parish church in which she was married. She believed it was near one of the bridges, and she thought it was named either St. Mary's or St. Michael's—if it was not St. Catherine's. It was plain it was a London church to her and that was all."

Mr. Westmacott smiled grimly at the poor young bride's obliviousness; even Harry laughed a short laugh.

The discussion was dropped, since there was nothing further to be done till renewed inquiries were made, till the papers in Harry's keeping were examined afresh, and till Miles Newton could produce the family Bible, to tell its own story of a once numerous and prosperous race, whose prosperity had undergone sundry fluctuations, which had dwindled down to the verge of extinction.

It was settled that, in the course of the following week—when Miles Newton's mails would have arrived, and when the process of telegraphing, which he had invited, was gone into and its results arrived at—there should be another meeting of the principals, and such allies as they liked to call in; when a formal investigation of the papers in Harry Newton's hands ought to be made.

Mr. Westmacott was very unhappy, not only on his client's account but because his own pro-

fessional character was at stake. The whole proceedings were horribly irregular. Harry's unconcealed glumness was not the tone he was bound to assume, while Mr. Miles Newton's uncalled-for candour and irrepressible loquacity, as it appeared to Mr. Westmacott, were equally improper.

Mr. Westmacott felt it absolutely incumbent upon him to offer two suggestions. First, he delicately hinted it might be better, to save all reflections, if the old travelling trunk with its contents was at once sought out and committed to the care of a neutral person. But Harry, who had been more or less stunned by the morning's work, did not seem to understand the gist of the proposal, and Miles Newton—in spite of his keen eyes which looked as if they saw all round a subject—did not second the proposal.

The lawyer's second suggestion was to the effect that Mr. Miles Newton ought to furnish himself with a legal adviser, to be present on the next occasion of their meeting.

But this advice the gentleman chiefly concerned frankly scouted "I don't wish to go to law," he said, "unless my cousin here particularly desires it. My notion is that the matter may be equitably settled between ourselves. Newton-Hayes is a nice little place, but it is a bagatelle after all."

The idea of reckoning Newton-Hayes a baga-

telle! These colonists were levellers with a vengeance.

"It is a question of the justice of a title which even a blind man might see, and no honest man would dispute," declared the claimant tranquilly.

"The consequences of the man's rashness and wrong-headedness will be on his own head," Mr. Westmacott told himself indignantly, and then he sought to relieve Harry Newton from the extreme awkwardness of either having to entertain at his table the pretender to his property, or of having to shut his door—as it were—in the face of a relation from a far country, who had come directly to him and made his claim in the most single-hearted manner. It was really for Harry Newton's sake, and because, however much Mr. Westmacott might deprecate, on principle, the gross impropriety in action, of this latest importation from Australia, it had to be owned that his behaviour was, so far, that of an honourable man who would not spring a mine on his antagonist, that the old lawyer came forward as he did. He might think later of expediency, but at this moment he had no plan for retaining the office of family lawyer whatever might befall. Mr. Westmacott invited Mr. Miles Newton to accompany him back to Atherney and be his guest for the time; an invitation which was accepted.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TEMPTER AND THE TEMPTED.

FOR the moment Harry Newton did not care where the challenger of his title to Newton-Hayes went, whether with Mr. Westmacott or another. He—Harry Newton—was longing to be rid of them both, and to be at liberty to think over the matter in his own way. Then, as ill luck would have it, in order to avoid rejoining his daughters and having at once to repeat to them what Miles Newton had stated, Harry strolled, with his cigar in his mouth, down the avenue where the traces of the wheels of Mr. Westmacott's departing dog-cart were still fresh, and took inadvertently the familiar road to Briarley. He was not paying any attention to the direction in which he was going. His mind was full of the threatened changes. If this new man—this brick-red Colonial man—was, as he vouched, the son of the cousin Miles, whom Harry

had known when he himself was a lad, a dreamy unpractical man—certainly this fellow did not look either dreamy or unpractical—whose father was the elder brother of Harry's grandfather, there could not be two opinions of what would be the end. It was true enough that there was no call to go to law, since even a child could tell you that there was not a law-court in the world, which would not maintain the superior claim of the elder brother and his descendants. Thus Miles Newton, and not Harry, was the true heir of the old squires of Newton-Hayes and was bound to be the present squire.

But how could Harry bear it? He had not been so happy in his new estate, he had found the time hang heavily on his hands, he had received the cold shoulder from his fellow squires. But he had got climatized, naturalized. Only the other day he and his girls had been enjoying themselves with the best at Briarley. How was he to go back to the drudgery of office work, even if a man of his age could easily obtain a clerk's situation? And if he did not obtain it, what would become of his Nanny and Nell who had begun to take their proper place among their peers, his Nell, whose bright prospects had seemed so assured only forty-eight hours ago? To turn back to the old dull routine, the old narrow

means, the old meagre fare (Harry called it meagre, as well as homely, to-day) why, the very cigar he was smoking would be forbidden to him, he would be condemned to the detestable make-shifts, which would be veritable dust and ashes in his mouth!

The weather had changed during the night and it had been a cold and showery morning. Harry was mechanically plodding along a muddy road, between dripping hedges, with his eyes on the ground, when the clatter of horses' hoofs caught his ear. He looked up in time to see that the horsemen, who were about to pass him, were Mr. Peregrine Saville and a groom at his heels.

Mr. Peregrine had always contrived to retain not merely his personal comforts, but in addition, the attributes of his station. The horse he rode was a fine thorough-bred, his groom was in irreproachable livery.

"Hallo, Newton," cried the first rider, affably, "are you taking a constitutional already? I need not speak, I felt so hipped by myself, with the habitations of men in town left behind me, that I was reduced to a gallop on my own account. If you like I'll walk back with you and let Edney take my horse. I wish to enquire after the young ladies and to be the special messenger to

convey to them, what I am sure is poor Perry's despair, at not only being called on to be our cicerone on the field-day, but at being laid hold of the moment he was up in camp, and detained on regimental business—most inopportune, the whole affair."

Harry caught at the proffered companionship. He was always hankering after companionship in whatever mood, but for some occult reason, which he himself could hardly have explained, he preferred, on the present occasion, that of a man and a brother versed in the ways of the world, to the society of Nanny and Nell.

Straightway, as might have been expected, without waiting to be sounded on the cause of his abstracted, disordered air, the harassed man made a clean breast of his trouble to his astounded friend and patron. "I say, Saville, a fellow has turned up from Australia, who calls himself a cousin of mine, descended from an older branch of the family, so that, if his story is true, he is the real owner of Newton-Hayes."

"Good Lord! What a disaster," muttered Saville under his moustache, and he wound up with the inward comment, "What an old idiot to tell the story to me, before that oaf Perry has fully committed himself!"

Aloud he said, after he had viciously bitten

the well-shaped nails of his ungloved hand, "Ain't it a cock-and-bull story, Newton, that some cur has got up in order to try and fleece you?"

"There was a nephew of my father's, about his own age, a Miles Newton with a wife and children who went out to the Colony with us," said Harry gloomily. "I recollect him quite well. I was a lad of eleven before they parted company with us, and went off, on their own hook, in the Adelaide direction. My father understood that, within the first two years, the man and his children were cut off by a fever which was prevalent, that only the woman was left, and that in course of time she married again."

"Depend upon it that was the way of it," said Mr. Peregrine Saville quickly as he recovered his assurance, "and she told her story, hence this attempt at a gross imposition, probably by a full grown brat born to her second husband. You must look sharp, Newton, or you will be taken in to a certainty. Excuse me, my dear fellow, you are as innocent as a babe and as soft-hearted as a woman."

"He looks an honest fellow, indeed, rather a fine fellow," objected Harry despondently. "He is a single man, I understand, not young and not old. He is a civil engineer, and if my girls—to whom he talked a good deal last night—

took him up correctly, he has done wonders in his profession and is greatly attached to it. I cannot say that he bears a great resemblance to what I remember of my cousin Miles, but I know that I have not much look of my father. Of course it is possible that there might have been a posthumous child, without our hearing of it at the Red Rock Falls, and, hang it! Saville, he would have been as nearly as possible the age of this fellow."

"Oh! never mind possibilities," cried the deeply-interested listener, "depend upon it the woman would have whined and sought to hang on your father, though the third of a continent lay between them,"

Other details were discussed, to the edification of Mr. Peregrine Saville. "The old story!" he protested contemptuously, "there is always a family Bible or an old tomb-stone or some such rot, to do duty in these apocryphal cases and green the unwary. But it does not suit to be too precise in these records, lest a charge of falsification and perjury be brought in. Sheer bosh to pretend that a woman could not remember the name of the church in which she was married. Trust her for that, though she should forget her own name. Rely upon it, old man, there was no marriage."

"You are out there, Saville," said Harry, turning, with some heat, upon the accuser. "My cousin's wife was an honest women, otherwise my father would not have had her about the place, either before or after my mother's death."

"Your father might have *believed* her honest," said Saville with emphasis.

"I tell you that you're wrong," insisted Harry. "I can recall her also—a proud, reserved sort of woman, who held herself apart, and kept her footing when she acted as mistress of the house and was the only white woman in the establishment. She was always very good to me, I used to think, because I took to the little chaps—her boys—and they were fond of me in return. I have not forgotten wandering disconsolately in the scrub for half a day, when I first heard of their deaths. No, I really cannot hear a word said against the poor mother."

"Nevertheless, from your description, she was the very woman to be at the bottom of a plot, by which she would move heaven and earth to serve her sole surviving child, or, if he had brothers and sisters, to benefit the entire troop," maintained her assailant stoutly. "She and her first husband might have gone through some form of marriage which satisfied their consciences, particularly after they had written it down

in that precious Bible of theirs. Or one of the two might have connived at a mock marriage and deceived the other—such little deceptions were still not altogether unheard of in those days,” explained Mr. Peregrine Saville with half closed eyes, a tilt of his turned-up chin, and a faint smile of superior intelligence. He hastened to go on, however, lest he should outrage the prudish morality of a half-bred Philistine like Harry, “Such a woman as you have painted, would die sooner than admit a *faux pas* to her son. Never tell me that a woman of the type you represent, would commit the copy of her marriage certificate to her husband’s care, or that she would be a party to his leaving it behind them, and not even take steps to reclaim it. Listen to me, Newton,” Harry’s confidant went on, speaking slowly and emphatically, “that certificate is not, and never could have been, among the papers which your late father, or his executors, consigned to your keeping.”

Then, as Harry stared in utter blankness at this confident assertion, the privileged adviser, with a quick shrug of his shoulders, assailed his victim on another tack, “Look here, my friend, you must not trust to your own resources, you must have a qualified lawyer to look after your interests, sift the matter to the bottom or, better still, quash it in its birth.”

"Didn't I tell you I sent for Westmacott at once?" mentioned Harry, with a faint satisfaction at having been found alert and discreet. "But this Miles Newton does not wish to go to law, if he can convince me and my friends that his claim is valid."

"Deucedly impertinent, and decidedly suspicious, on the part of this newly-found relation," said Saville, with his languid sneer. He roused himself to greater animation the next minute. "But let me warn you, Newton, Westmacott is no good, I know him of old, a strait-laced antiquated fogey. You must have more modern and sharper metal to cut the tangle; set a thief to catch a thief, eh? I can recommend my London lawyer, though Perry has a stupid, squeamish aversion to him. He is worth something, has all the scoundrelly tricks of the trade at his finger ends, and is up to any number of dodges."

"Thanks," answered Harry, not without a shortness of tone, in spite of his propensity to think no evil, and at the same time to cherish evil-doers.

Mr. Peregrine Saville stopped short, and this time bit the tips of his riding glove. He was asking himself whether he might venture to speak more plainly. "I only want to be of some use to you," he said, tentatively.

"I'm sure of that," answered Harry, heaving a sigh of ready relenting, "it's very kind of you to have the patience to listen to me, and to take so much interest in my concerns."

"Idiot!" again groaned Saville, between his teeth.

"You've no idea," went on the unconscious Harry, "what a comfort it is to me to have spoken to you, and that you do not think—though I cannot agree with all you say—that there is no chance of my retaining my place. I never thought I should have cared half so much; but it is not I alone who am involved in the question."

"Of course you care," broke in Saville, "and of course it is not you alone who are concerned. For God's sake, Newton, think of your daughters, how their prospects will be ruined by the least weakness on your part. This man who has burst in upon your security and peace, and scattered them to the winds, while he professes to be active in the interests of justice and of kinship, for anything I can tell, has not half the stake in the matter which you have. You tell me he is a middle-aged single man, with a profession in which he seems to have attained eminence, in which he has, doubtless, coined money."

"He spoke of Newton-Hayes as a bagatelle," said Harry almost piteously.

"Just so, like the confounded cheek of these Colonial men—I make no question that he is Colonial in all his habits and associations. "Then what the mischief is he doing here? Why should he be permitted to rob you and your daughters of the property and station to which you were raised—in all good faith on your part and on that of the authorities who acknowledged your right? Your innocent, charming daughters will be thrown back on the world the next thing to penniless," protested the squire of Briarley, with a glitter, which looked almost like that of tears, in the smouldering fires of his eyes. "It will be totally out of the power of the friends who have learnt to value them so highly, to do anything to help them and you—take that to heart, my dear fellow—for the very good reason that we shall all be in the same boat—as poverty-stricken as the other unfortunates in this world."

Mr. Peregrine Saville accompanied Harry Newton as far as the avenue gates, plying him with insidious representations, hammering into him that, even if he were not going to be cheated, he and his daughters were about to be stripped and left destitute, in the most heartless manner, and repeating impressively that the papers referred to could not have lain unnoticed, in the old Australian trunk, all these years, even though,

as Harry tried to put in his word, they had not been looked for in the meantime. But not a step farther than the avenue gates did Mr. Peregrine Saville go. He forgot all about being Captain Perry's special messenger, and he considered the time inopportune for the delivery of the message.

Not, if he could prevent it, should another advance, though it were no wider than a hair's breadth, be made, which could farther compromise his son, until this disgusting difficulty of conflicting heirs for Newton-Hayes was settled. The squire of Briarley could have gnashed his teeth at the recollection of his own deed—in the public display, of his and Captain Perry's wishes and intentions made within the week.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NIGHTMARE.

IT was impossible, even if it had been advisable, to hide from Nanny—who had dimly divined something of the truth—and from Nell—who had not entertained the faintest suspicion of what might be the issue of Miles Newton's visit to Newton-Hayes,—that their father's possession of the estate was hanging in the balance. Inevitably both girls were deeply anxious with regard to the result of the investigation, but the anxiety took a different colour and shape according to the different temperaments and aspirations of the persons concerned.

Happily for Nell, she only partially comprehended what were likely to be the consequences—if her father were worsted—to the radiantly happy and tender dreams, in which she had been indulging lately. She did not scruple to speak of Captain Perry in connection with the strange

news and the trying state of uncertainty in which they were plunged. She wondered what he would say to it all, and whether he would think there could be any foundation for the claim, in which Mr. Miles Newton appeared to believe implicitly. She had even a wistful doubt that the engrossing pre-occupation of everybody interested in the sequel, might delay that declaration, which had long ago been quite sufficiently expressed in other ways than by direct speech, and that there might be farther delay in the marriage, which was to make two people who were one in heart and soul already, one also in name and life. But she failed to realize, as yet, that her father's loss of the position of squire of Newton-Hayes must mean her final separation from her lover. How could it, when they loved each other, and life and the world were before them?

Nanny was devoutly thankful for Nell's temporary unconsciousness. The mother's heart in the elder sister would fain spare suffering to the younger as long as it was possible. The terrible strain of the suspense was bad enough, without the knowledge, by anticipation, that Nell's hopes were blighted and her heart broken. If, indeed, that was all which was to come to the little family from their year's reign at Newton-Hayes, better they had remained in obscurity, making the

best of their narrow means in Paradise Row.

Nanny and Nell were impelled to wander about, in the summer weather, anywhere and everywhere, in the gardens, in the shrubberies, in the park—anywhere within the bounds of the small domain of which they had thought so much when they came to it, twelve months before. If they had learnt to care less for it they were now making amends; a sub-consciousness of its peacefulness, beauty, and modest bountifulness was with them wherever they went, underlying and pervading every other sensation. The girls were restless and could not sit still with their usual occupations in the house. They shrank from going outside the gates, lest they should read, in the unguarded eyes of some neighbour suddenly encountered, a floating rumour, a dawning suspicion of the misfortune which was hanging over Harry Newton and his daughters. Their father, for the first time in their lives, persistently and obstinately avoided them.

The two girls were thrown back on each other's society and sympathy, as they had been in every trouble of their youth. Nell, who, in spite of her superiority in size, was always the sooner tired in any exercise the sisters shared, invited Nanny to sit down on a seat, under a walnut tree, bursting into leaf, in the park. The

seat was placed so as to command a good view of the undulating country which lay beyond the park wall and stretched away into a misty blue distance. The couple sat in silence for a few minutes, during which Nell pulled one of the leaves of the tree, still in its vivid green, brushed with soft olive, crushed it between her taper fingers and smelt absently at its fragrance.

"Nanny," she said abruptly, "don't you think it was treacherous and mean of Mr. Miles Newton to get admittance into the house, drink tea with you and me in the most friendly manner, while all the time he was proposing to oust father?"

Nanny could not restrain a laugh, though her heart was sore and heavy. "My dear, it may be the man's own house he sought to enter, it may even be, in a sense, his tea which we took upon us graciously to dispense to him. Oh dear, what deluded, arrogant young geese of impostors he must have thought us!"

"He had no right to think such things," Nell defended herself and her sister with some spirit. "And, what is more, I am certain he never thought them. He was quite pleasant and courteous, though a little unceremonious, you remember? I admit he was even interesting and entertaining, with his stories of another hemisphere and of his primitive travels, and he looked as if

he liked to interest and entertain us. What I complain of is, that he should have taken us in, meaning all the time to pay us back badly for doing our best for him."

"That is for giving him a cup of tea, for which he may be held to have paid, and for letting him into the house of which he may turn out to be the master? I do not see the great obligation. He could not well tell us on the spot the facts which he communicated to father. I am afraid we showed him pretty plainly that we regarded him as an impostor—at least I did—while, it may be, it was we who were the impostors all the time, although we did not know it. It is dreadful to think of it," ended Nanny, leaning back her head and recklessly crushing her hat against the tree-trunk in her affront and vexation.

Nell was not prepared to take this view of the case, though it had been, often enough, presented to her lately. She said nothing, while she continued to crush and smell her walnut-tree leaf, now a mere pulp, staining the hollow of her hand.

"It is not, either, as if he were like any other man we knew—a man of his age, who has done and seen so much in the course of his life, who has been a leader, guide, and benefactor to his

fellows, as it was evident he had been, though it came out casually and inadvertently. What a pair of impertinent monkeys of girls he must have thought us, to presume to patronize and entertain him, when, for anything we can tell, he may have the best right to everything we see around us, and we may be at the best foolish intruders."

"I am certain we never patronized him," remonstrated Nell. "I cannot tell what has taken you, Nanny, that you should go on accusing yourself and me unjustly. It is as if you were ranging yourself on the enemy's side and seeing through his eyes—not that I believe he sees as you profess to do. He looked—to do him justice—perfectly simple and unassuming."

"Like any man who has a grain of true greatness in him, which is all the more reason that he should have been treated with the greatest consideration and respect, as I have no doubt he is accustomed to be."

"I do not understand you," said Nell, with puzzled plaintiveness, "indeed I did not mean to be disrespectful, I would not be rude or impertinent to anybody."

"No," owned Nanny penitently, "you were far kinder and more generous than I. You generally are."

"Nonsense," said Nell, with renewed briskness. "Where should we be—all of us—without you? And, I say, Nanny, father's cause is not lost yet. Mr. Westmacott said, when he looked in last night, that it was for Mr. Miles Newton to establish his claim. If some papers of which father knows nothing, which he may or may not have, are not to be found, or if there has been any irregularity in the keeping of the register of a nameless London parish seventy years ago, the claim will fall to the ground, because Miles Newton's legal rights will not be proved."

"And think what that would be to him!" cried Nanny indignantly. "He has entire faith in his case, and its collapse will mean loss of confidence in himself, in his father and mother, in everybody. You do not suppose it would be a light penalty for such a man to pay; to have the honourable name he has made for himself dragged through the mire; to have his father and mother's marriage questioned, and the stigma of illegitimacy fastened on him, because of the absence of some red-tape piece of evidence, which has nothing to do with the truth or the falsehood, the right or the wrong of the case. He would figure in the light of a baffled claimant, a baulked adventurer. You would have that, though you know this is a man who has been accustomed

to succeed, who has compelled success, while he is not yet gray-headed, in great public undertakings, which have been a blessing to his colony, not in petty personal efforts! I tell you, Nell, this is a man of high aims and large ambitions, and you can consent, in your small interests, that he should fail ignominiously and be shamed in what has been, perhaps, his sole personal desire! You call him an enemy, you ought not to do so. He did not come in an enemy's spirit. He came only to ask what he believed was his own, and he gave father and all of us the credit of supposing that he had but to tell us what we were ignorant of, and to prove his words, to find us as willing to resign what was his, as he would have been if he had been in our place, and we in his. Remember—whatever may happen—there is no room to doubt, according to what has been telegraphed from Australia that he is father's cousin, and, after us two, his nearest blood relation.

Having thus snubbed Nell severely, a treatment which the culprit bore with a mixture of bewilderment and meekness, Nanny's heart began to bleed anew for her unconscious sister. She did not attempt to take back her words, or to offer an affectionate apology for their vehemence. But, when the two returned to the house, to the room

which the pair shared as they had shared everything from infancy, which Nell, especially, had taken delight in embellishing, Nanny lingered behind her sister and locked herself in for a little space.

It was only to sit like a statue—dry-eyed—and tell herself: “Oh! my poor, beautiful, sweet Nell, to think you may be called upon to pay the chief price! If it had not been for you and your Captain Perry, I think I should not have cared so much for father and myself; we have kept an innocent man long enough out of his due, for the dreadful thing to me is, that whatever it may be shown to be in point of law, I am convinced it is his by moral right. Nobody could look in his face and not see that, if he said a thing, he was convinced of the truth of what he said. It is such a brave, single-hearted, earnest face, to have toiled and striven all these forty years, and not grown weary in its single heartedness and earnestness, and we, who might have been proud to count ourselves his kin, are combining to defraud him.”

That night, as Nanny lay tossing by her sleeping sister, when a fresh day was about to break and the gray dawn to disperse the shadows of the night, there came to her one of those inexplicable quaking terrors, one of those subtly piercing intuitions of an importunate necessity to be up

and doing, which occasionally assail the most reasonable people. No mortal can tell the origin and inspiration of the overwhelming impression—whether it is of the spirit world, only parted from us by a thin veil; whether it belongs to some occult mystery of irrepressible sympathy on the part of this fearful and wonderful human nature of ours, which no skilled medicine man, or learned philosopher, has ever thoroughly sifted and exhausted.

All that Nanny knew was that, though it was the middle of the night, she must instantly rise up and go to her father. He needed her, he was calling for her, though she heard no voice, she was so certain of it that she cried—half holding her breath not to waken Nell—as she sprang from her bed, “Yes, father, I am coming.”

If she did not obey the call at once, she could not tell what awful calamity might not befall the family. She was trembling violently, because of the force of the emotion which had laid hold on her, but she was still sufficiently mistress of herself to put on her dressing-gown, strike a match and light a candle—shading it from her sister’s closed eyes—before she softly opened the door, and stole along the couple of corridors, and down and up two short flights of stairs which separated the girls’ room from their father’s. She stopped

for a second before the closed door: what plausible excuse had she, for disturbing him at this hour of the night? He had not looked himself for the last week, and her unexpected presence might not so much make him angry, as startle and agitate him, so as to do him bodily harm. A narrow bar of pale light beneath his door, decided her. She gently opened the bed-room door which was neither locked nor bolted, according to Harry's confiding custom—a custom which, even if he had been the master spirit in a plot to overthrow the British Constitution, it would not have occurred to him to forgo.

The room was in partial darkness, only lighted sufficiently for her to see that her father was not in bed, and that the light came from the dressing-room beyond—the door of which stood half open.

Nanny put down the light she had held and advanced lightly with her slippered feet to the door of the dressing-room. Her father was within, wearing the clothes he had worn the preceding evening. He was stooping down before a large, battered, old travelling trunk, which Nanny knew as "the Australian Trunk." It had been stowed away in the garret at Paradise Row. Here, it had been deposited in a large closet opening out of Harry's room, from some fancy

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of the master of the house to have a relic which had belonged to his father, to his boyhood and to the distant colony in which he had been reared, still near him, as Nanny had imagined. He must have dragged the old trunk from its resting place, unfastened it with the key in his possession, and half emptied it of its contents, for the chairs, couch, and carpet around him were strewn and heaped with papers—in piles and bundles, wrapped in yellowing newspapers, hastily torn open or tied together with tape which had been wrenched asunder. He was still adding to their number. He was pulling out more papers, leaning back to glance over them by the light of the candle on the table behind him, and then flinging them recklessly on the heaps accumulating on every side of him.

Nanny could hear his panting breath, the result of his unusual exertions, or was it the effect of the irresistible curiosity and gnawing suspense which had goaded him on to learn his fate, against all rule and in defiance of discretion? Was it a half formed dastardly criminal purpose, against which the man's better nature strove in fierce revolt?

In truth, it was largely owing to the mute company in whose presence Harry was pursuing his dangerous operations, and to his consciousness of their

close attendance on every dubious nefarious act. He knew that he was not alone in his own dressing-room in the middle of the night, though he was perfectly unconscious of the only living creature—his daughter Nanny—standing in the shadow of the half open door, watching him.

Like a famous historical personage—Richard the Crookback—on the eve of the battle of Bosworth, poor Harry had been constrained to entertain uninvited guests, to look into reproachful eyes—long closed—and listen to accusing voices—long silent—while he went about his self imposed task. The old man—his father—who had been so honest and sturdy, and so proud and hopeful for his son, had stood by Harry's side while he turned over memoranda and accounts connected with the Red Rock Falls estate, charts and specifications belonging to the disastrous mining speculation, even some of Harry's early Oxford bills. But old John Newton was by no means the only witness to the ceremony.

CHAPTER XVII.

“IS IT WORTH IT, FATHER?”

WHAT a spectral company it was! There was the cousin Miles with whom Harry had been well acquainted when a boy, the long-legged, small-bodied man, melancholy yet humorous, like Jaques of Arden, always dissatisfied, yet not without a cynical perception of his dissatisfaction. Harry began to see, beyond the possibility of error on his part, a kind of shadowy resemblance between the two cousin Miles—the elder who could jest at his own discomfiture, and the younger who had not been discomfited, who had done what he wished and had been content; while he could not withhold a laugh under the provocation of his mother’s having forgotten the very name of the London church in which she was married.

There were the little lads—the small barbarians of the bush—to whom the big boy—Harry

Newton—had been an unapproachable hero, an all-victorious young king, of whom he had been fond in his turn, the news of whose untimely death had been the first shock and sharp pang to Harry's vigorous youth. He would have believed, only a week ago, that he had forgotten their every lineament, yet there they were before him, flaxen-haired and sunburnt, as vividly real as in life.

There was their mother too—why, she haunted and harassed him more than any of the other ghosts who were hovering about him, and interfering with what he was doing! He supposed it was because he had heard Saville disparage her without knocking him down, and he himself was tempted to deal her fair name a cruel, cowardly blow, which might cause her very son to doubt and distrust her. Harry saw her again, as plainly as if they had parted yesterday—a tall, faded, care-worn woman, the only white woman at Red Rock Falls, or for miles around. She was practically left to herself for the greater part of the day; she had learnt to be silent, as a matter of necessity; she had kept her troubles to herself as she looked after the household, and had grown taciturn and reserved. But her words, though few, had always been friendly to her sons' playmate and guardian. Many a little dainty she

had cooked and stored up for him when, by his own carelessness, he was absent from the family meals. She had taken care of the clothes which he was apt to treat cavalierly enough, with the greatest attention to his comfort and to his creditable appearance as the son of the principal owner of Red Rock Falls. During a solitary experience of illness she had nursed him, with a mother's ungrudging devotion. Her eyes had always been grave and anxious, but they had never held a spark of hostility to him till to-night.

He was searching excitedly for what he could not find. He began to have a wild hope that he had been right when he had said, without much warrant, in the presence of Mr. Westmacott and Miles Newton the younger, that he—Harry—did not believe he had any of the elder Miles' papers in his possession.

At that moment his hand fell on a small unshapely parcel, tied with string. He tugged at the string till the knot gave way. Within an outer covering were several tightly-rolled-up papers of different sizes, on paper of different colours and textures. Harry read what was written on the covering, with strained methodicalness, as if he were engaged on a perfectly lawful and proper business. The round handwriting ran thus: "My Papers, committed to the care of my Uncle John

Newton, of Red Rock Falls, as my wife Sarah and I have made up our minds to try and start on our own account and that of the children; and it may not be safe—while there is no need—to carry the papers with us, not knowing what may befall us travelling through a district where the bush-rangers have not all been put down, and where the blacks have been troublesome of late. God grant we reach our destination in safety. Signed: Miles Newton." with the date Harry well remembered. The first of the enclosed papers was the said Miles Newton's will, of no use to any human being.

The next was a paper, signed respectively by John and Miles Newton, in which Miles, in consideration of a certain sum of money, paid down to him, relinquished the small interest he had held in the Red Rock Falls property. Useless also.

Ah! here were copies of the certificates of the baptism of the elder Miles Newton and of his father's marriage at Twineham Church, in Huntingdonshire.

These were the certificates of which the brick-red man—their descendant, who had made all the stir—had said it would be a simple enough matter to procure duplicates.

Harry's hand shook like a leaf in an autumn gale, when he took up the remaining paper. Yes,

it was a copy of the very certificate which the claimant had admitted it might be hard to recover; the certificate of the marriage of Miles Newton of Twineham Farm, Huntingdonshire, and of Sarah Cree of the same place, both resident, for the time being, in the parish of St. Mary-lè-Strand, London, at the church of the said parish, duly attested by qualified witnesses.

The slip of paper fluttered in Harry's hand, vibrating with each hard-drawn breath and with the draught from the open doors. He thrust it dangerously near the streaming flame from the candle, as if to decipher the contents better.

The next moment he sprang to his feet, with a face like ashes.

"Oh! is it worth it, father?" asked a voice, in which sounded at once a solemn challenge and an imploring appeal, and, turning towards it, his daughter Nanny stood revealed in the doorway, between the two rooms.

"What are you doing here, Nanny?" stuttered Harry, in a loud, blustering tone which was quite unnatural to him. "How dare you come into my room at such a time when I am particularly engaged, as you see, and have not sent for you?"

"But you wanted me," said Nanny, still with unconscious solemnity. "I knew it even though I was lying in bed, thinking only how I might

go to sleep, then, of course, there was nothing I would not have done to come to you."

Harry had calmed down and recovered his outward composure, though anyone, watching him narrowly, might have seen that he had still a difficulty in overcoming a slight trembling of his hands and chattering of his teeth.

"Well, my dear, I am much obliged to you for your solicitude, but it is foolish of you, and not what I should have expected from your sense, to leave your bed and go wandering over the house because of some silly dream. You see, there is nothing wrong with me and I'm sorry if I've been cross with you. Don't you think the best thing will be for you to go back to your room at once, lest you catch cold, or Nell should awake and come after you, and I should have both of you on my hands in the small hours? Off with you, Nanny, and leave me to—to the tidying up of that old lumber, before it is taken down to the library to be poked into by those precious bull-dogs, or blood-hounds—I don't know which to call them," broke off Harry, with forced pleasantries.

"Let me help you, father," urged Nanny, catching up his tone instantly. "You were not brought up a business man, like Mr. Westmacott or Mr. Miles Newton, you are not good at

setting your house in order." She strove to speak quietly and cheerfully. "Let me gather up these loose papers, which you've let fall out of that envelope, and tie them up again securely. They will get mixed up with the others if you do not take care, and—and are they not the very papers which are wanted—Mr. Miles Newton's papers?" She looked him steadily in the face, with piteous, but unflinching eyes, as she would have sought to control a madman, for surely her father was on the verge of madness that night.

The father and the daughter gazed at each other in silence for a second, then she said: "If you like, I'll put them back, lock them up and take the key, so that you may not be farther troubled with them. I'll see that they are forthcoming in the morning, we need not mind about the rest, we can finish tidying them up to-morrow." She tried to speak as if the suggestion were of no moment, but, in spite of herself, her voice shook and faltered so that it was painful to hear it.

He heard it, looked again into her honest steadfast eyes, and turned away, unable to bear their light.

"Have it your own way, child," he said, half testily, half wearily. Then he broke down utterly, threw aside the paper which would cost him Newton-Hayes and flung himself heavily on the

couch near him, pushing aside the other papers heaped on it, with a kind of irrational anger, as if they were so many living foes contemplating his defeat and rejoicing over it. He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud. "It is cruelly hard upon me, Nanny, I neither knew nor cared about the succession to this place, I certainly never sought after it, but to give it up after I've held it for a year—only a year; and to be reduced to the old insignificance, the old straitened circumstances—I daresay ten times worse than before; to have twice had to endure such a reverse, in the course of my life, is enough to make a rogue of the most upright of men."

She took no notice of his admission, she cast her eyes down with a shame-faced expression, to avoid meeting his eye as he made it, but she flung her soft white arms, from which the wide sleeves of her dressing-gown fell back, round his neck, holding him in a passionate embrace, and reminding him with the most loving persuasion, "We were happy, dear, in Paradise Row, and none was happier than you, can we not be happy, in the same way, again?"

Harry shook his bowed-down head.

"It was different. It was a case where ignorance was bliss," he explained, looking up with a rueful smile. "It is easy enough not to miss

what we never had, or had in other circumstances; it is difficult to give it all up and return to what can no longer content us. But it is not for myself that my heart is sore, it is for you two poor girls—all the bright and happy hopes, with which you came here, overthrown and crushed out of existence. You, so well calculated to adorn the station into which you were lifted, dashed down again, from no fault of yours!”

“Never mind us, father,” protested Nanny, with brave cheerfulness, “we shall do very well, as we did before. I don’t know that we—that I, at least—have taken any great root in the new soil. I have sometimes been tempted to think it a poor enough soil for intelligent minds and immortal souls, after all. But I must take care not to whisper that now, lest people say the grapes are sour. Nell and I will be willing, glad to do anything to work, to beg even, rather than that you should—”

“Than that I should steal,” blurted out Harry bitterly, while again Nanny hung her head. “That paper was not mine and I was in a fair way to destroy it, when you interrupted me,” he said recklessly, “I almost wish you had not come when you were not wanted.” His eyes began to blaze again—those mild bovine eyes which had so rarely kindled with anger. “What made

the fellow come here? He has neither son, nor daughter, nor wife? He is alone in the world. He has his profession and all he cares for out there—very likely he is richer than we were when Newton-Hayes was ours. Why could he not let us alone?"

Then Nanny raised herself in her youthful righteousness. "He came for his own," she said emphatically. "He had faith in us, that the moment we saw it was his by right we would be willing to give up what was not ours. How could we desire to keep it from him when he had the prior claim, or to fail him when he trusted us?"

"And your fine prospects, yours and Nell's? My pretty Nell!—her marriage will be all in the air now," continued Harry, with almost childish persistency. "I can tell you, Nanny, Saville will have nothing to say to her—he as good as told me so—however fair and sweet she may be, if she is penniless, and it will break the heart of my little girl—Lucy's daughter—her mother's image."

Nanny did not stop to ask which of the Savilles he meant, the elder or the younger.

"Well, let it be so, let him go," she said with passionate scorn. "He is not worth lamentation and wrong-doing, any more than the rest that we have lost is worth it."

"Easy to say, Nanny, easy to say," repeated Harry gloomily, but he was in his right mind once more. He picked up the paper he had flung down, smoothed it out deliberately, and handed it to her. "There, keep the thing till daylight. I cannot go to the Devil in broad daylight with the sun shining in upon me. The miserable scrap—on which the dead set such store that they dared not risk it, when they were risking their lives—can be put back in its place then. Go away back to bed, child, or you'll get your death and that will not help us." He looked round and shivered, although it was a summer night. "I'll leave this mess as it is, and turn in myself."

She took the paper, looked anew into his haggard face, flung her arms round him once more, kissed him affectionately and turned to go.

He called her back. "You'll not tell her—Nell," he begged, with wistful furtive glance and whitening lips, his voice sinking into a whisper.

"No, never," she assured him with all her heart and soul. "You may depend upon me. What did you think me? Can you and I not have a secret and keep it?"

She was fain to speak as if she made light of the secret, which was crimsoning her cheeks with shame for him, and weighing like a load of guilt

which she herself had incurred, on her heart, even while she strove to convince him that, however he might have humiliated himself in her eyes, the humiliation should not be breathed to sully the ears, and wound to the quick, his best-beloved daughter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURRENDER.

"**T**HERE, gentlemen, is the paper you want. I have to congratulate you, Cousin Miles," said Harry Newton, when the business appointment was kept in the library at Newton-Hayes.

He made no secret of what he had been about, as he tossed the missing paper, which was most in request, across the table. He was no longer pale but flushed, and wearing well-nigh an air of elation. The lumbering old trunk before him was standing unlocked and thrown open, and its heterogeneous papers had evidently been rummaged through and turned over, which no doubt accounted for the fact that Harry could at once put his hand on the copy of the certificate in question.

Mr. Westmacott rapped the table with his ivory-white knuckles, in his exasperation, and stared at the speaker reproachfully. "Out of order,

disgracefully out of order," his gesture and look said.

Miles Newton examined the paper with eager satisfaction. "Ah! you have found it," he cried heartily. "I thought so. But, if it had been lost, I should never have rested, till I had had every parish register in London hunted up, and examined, though the business had taken months to accomplish. There was not only the place at stake, there was the confirmation of my poor mother's words." He stopped, as if he recalled another consideration, and looked fixedly, in a puzzled way, at his cousin.

But nothing could be said to a man who had straightway produced the missing link in the chain of proof against himself. Instead of putting the smallest obstruction in the path of justice, he was doing his utmost, however irregularly, to aid his adversary.

Harry was now quite composed, though it was clear that his cheerfulness was forced, yet he looked and spoke with as much spirit as that displayed by the brick-red man before him, who in place of his usual interested, alert look, appeared, for some reason, perplexed and *distract*.

"Then am I to understand, Mr. Newton, that you do not mean to oppose your relative's claim?" inquired Mr. Westmacott, stiffly and gravely.

Harry nodded, and, to make assurance doubly sure, said plainly, "That is my meaning."

"Don't you think, sir, your determination is rather hasty?" objected the lawyer, knitting his brows and feeling considerably put out, on his own account. He found himself in trying and extraordinary circumstances. On the one hand, he was burdened with a client who had always been unsophisticated, to the verge of folly. On the other, he was entangled with an adversary, who, shrewd as he seemed in some respects, had distinctly declined to appoint a lawyer to see him through a troublesome affair.

"What does it signify whether my determination is hasty or otherwise, if it is founded on right reason?" answered Harry, in a more nettled tone than was called for, but any amount of irritability might well be overlooked in a man in Harry's situation.

"I cannot say that I should advise legal measures to protect your rights," resumed Mr. Westmacott, who was not altogether shaken out of his wonted precision and deliberation. "I must admit that the evidence strikes me as too incontestable for that course, but I should certainly like, for my own comfort and credit, to have further opinion of counsel."

"Do you suggest that my cousin and I should

go to law for your satisfaction?" demanded Harry, taking up the cudgels against his friend and quondam agent, with a gruffness and rudeness grafted on his recent jaunty bluster, both moods being wholly foreign to the natural man.

"I confess, I do not see why we should pile up and protract the agony," argued the man from the bush, "if we are mutually satisfied—that is," he corrected himself quickly, "convinced of the direction in which justice lies. I presume a formal application to the proper court will settle the matter and effect the transfer. To heap up costs, which will fall on the loser, may be the technical line to pursue, but, pardon me, Mr. Westmacott, it does not recommend itself to my common sense, as wise in any light."

"So far from proposing to make any fight for what I recognize is not mine," said Harry, in the jerky defiant manner in which he had previously spoken, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and leaning back in the chair, "I am going to vacate the place to my successor at once—that is, within the next few days. I shall discharge the servants, unless he chooses to take them on, tomorrow, and carry off my family belongings—such as they are—in fact, cut my stick without loss of time. I have nothing more to do here

and I want to be off without incurring more expense—I am sick of the whole business.”

“There is not the slightest obligation on you to leave in this hurried way,” remonstrated Miles Newton, taken aback by Harry’s brusqueness and approach to levity. “There is a great deal to settle yet.”

“There are questions of compensation and compromise,” represented Mr. Westmacott hastily. “Why! so strange a proceeding will look like flight, like irreconcilable hostility between two relatives; such ill-advised rashness may even, if you will forgive me, sir, for reminding you of the possible consequences, bring undeserved aspersions upon your character.” Mr. Westmacott’s outraged official dignity, as well as his shrewdness and fidelity, compelled him to make the last suggestion.

But all the excellent plans brought forward, with genuine anxiety, to serve the culprit who was proposing to act more like a child in a pet than like a reasonable being, were utterly disregarded, and set at naught, by Harry. There was, in his conduct at this crisis, an element of *feyness*, and, as everybody knows, a *fey* man acts in direct contrast to his natural character and is not altogether responsible for his actions. He repeated that he was sick of the short-lived struggle.

He insisted that what had to be done were better done without delay. He scouted the notion of compensation and compromise, in the airiest and most extravagant fashion. He thought if he gave up everything on the spot, he might be held free from the necessity of repaying such of the year's rental as had passed into his hands. In point of fact, the larger part of it had been spent, by anticipation, under Mr. Westmacott's advice, on the improvement of the property and on the few alterations in the house. As for the money which the lawyer and Lady Gosforth had advanced, for Harry to start with, until he should come into the income from the estate, he would pay it back if he lived; and if he paid by small instalments he daresayed they would bear with him and not be hard creditors. What was there to settle, unless damages? and whatever these were could be done as well, nay, better, after he had left Newton-Hayes. "Flight?" Yes, it was flight from an untenable and intolerable position, and when the retreat was accomplished, all the world willing to see, would admit it was the only course for an honest man, with the spirit of a fly, to pursue. Would they have him go on masquerading under false colours, a moment longer than he could help? Did they wish him to sink, overwhelmed, by a calamity which was no

fault of his? Ought he not rather to take immediate steps to recover himself, so as to be fit for the performance of such duties in life as remained to him? He would take his character into his own keeping, he might be safely trusted to look after it. He thought neither friend nor foe of his could deny his right to act, according to the best of his judgment, in what he begged to tell them was his own concern.

"And where are we going, father?" inquired Nanny, when Harry Newton was alone with his daughters and had told them what had come to pass, while Nell's consternation was too overpowering to leave her voice to speak.

"Why! back to Foxchester, of course," said Harry, opening his eyes wide, as if there could not be two opinions. "Where else should we go, when your mother is there? That is, she is lying in St. Nicholas' churchyard there," he explained, with a momentary stammer and some confusion; "and when my time comes I expect to be laid beside her."

"But that will not be for many a day, please God, for our sakes," said Nanny gently.

"No, I hope not, my dears," acquiesced Harry at once, with a restless sigh. "Another reason for my going to Foxchester is, that I think, if I were there, I should get office work again with-

out much difficulty. I may even find my old berth waiting for me. Do you know when Coxe was here, he said he did not think he should retain Lane for more than the year? You remember Lane, who was under me, and got the step when I left? Well, the arrangement has not turned out satisfactorily. Lane was always a flighty beggar, and now he is thinking of trying to get some agency in Birmingham—or Bristol, was it?—where his friends are. Anyhow the chance is worth looking after—don't you think so, girls?"

It was like Harry to double back on the old refuge; at the same time Nanny, who was the only girl capable of reflecting, and who had been doing nothing save think of the family's future for the last twelve hours, could not, whatever her inclinations said to the contrary, contradict him. Her father was no longer young. He had never had the regular training, nor the energy which might have supplied the lack of training, that would have fitted him to compete successfully with the smart pushing clerks, drawn from another class, and developed by a different method, who, in age, might have been his sons. Foxchester, where he had been known and liked, might hold the best opening for him. Nanny, too might get an engagement, and take her place in the High School at Foxchester, as she had origin-

ally proposed, when the Newtons quitted Newton-Hayes. The question was not—Nanny told herself severely—how much or how little mortification they might be spared, nor even what temptations they might escape, as how best and soonest they might earn their daily bread.

Apart from the reasonable recommendations of the place which she dared not refuse to consider, Nanny had a feeling that, to her father, going back to Foxchester was, in many respects, like going home to her mother. He was in haste to do it. He could not be quiet till he did it. Standing by her grave would be like telling her everything, confiding to her how sorely he had been tried, and how near he had been to doing something which would have shocked her inexpressibly, so that it would have parted them even if she had been still alive. But it was all over—the precipice on whose brink he had stood, the gulf which had yawned at his feet—he had paid the forfeit, and he would be able to say, gladly, that he had not done it; he had been saved, thank God! from the guilt and the infamy. Perhaps, she would tell him it was she who had sent their girl, his and hers, their little Nanny, to interpose in time? Anyhow she would know he was sorry that the base thought had ever entered his head, and all would be well again.

In the face of these surmises, which were next door to convictions, it seemed of small account to Nanny that she and Nell should have to endure the pain of returning to the old quarters, which they had left in very different circumstances. She might feel their part in the performance later, but at present she could not afford the leisure to brood and fret over it.

As for Nell, she was stunned by the blow, and past active exertion of any kind, so that everything fell on Nanny, who was aware, in the bustle and worry of sudden departure, that she must be furnished with memory, foresight and resource for three persons instead of one. It was well for the little woman that she was as bright as polished steel, with the fine temper and elasticity of the best steel, on an emergency.

Poor Nell had realized, at last, what the loss of Newton-Hayes meant to her. There were various signs calculated to enlighten even the most single-hearted. Mr. Peregrine Saville had disappeared from the scene, during these last momentous days. No message or letter had come from Captain Perry, to whom, surely, his father must have communicated a piece of news which interested him so nearly, which even now was about to burst on the neighbourhood. Worldly precepts and maxims, appropriate to the situation,

which Nell had heard, more than once, confidently enumerated during the last twelve months, without paying much heed to the speakers, suddenly recurred to her mind with irresistible force. Captain Perry could no longer think of marrying her, innocent as she was of any offence against their love, however much he might regret the grim necessity of giving her up. In his set there could not be two opinions on the subject. The pair were both young, with bodies and minds in their prime. The world and life, with all their endless possibilities, lay before the two; nevertheless marriage was impossible, according to the verdict of the county. He would be mad to take such an unheard-of, destructive step, she would be mad to consent to it for his sake, still more than for her own. Even an indefinite engagement was very much to be deprecated. Nell, brought up with a totally different standard, could not see or comprehend the impossibility, but her meekness and submission—above all, her dread of injuring the man she loved as her own soul—would cause her to take the verdict on trust, and bow to it. She was cut to the tender heart, the bright world was darkened to her, but she struggled desperately to conform herself to what must be. Not even to Nanny would Nell complain or imply that Captain Perry had failed her, and that.

she was being shamefully used. Nell was simple and gentle, but she was neither weak nor disloyal. If she could have hidden her white cheeks and the heavy eyes, with the dark rings underneath them, she would have done it. As it was, she held up her drooping head every time anybody, especially every time her father and sister, looked at her. She was bent on giving no trouble and on aiding Nanny to the utmost of Nell's power, till her strength all at once collapsed and she had to creep up to her room, too thankful to escape observation, and stay there till she found fresh capacity for endurance, to pray for help where help was never denied, to lie down on her bed and turn her face to the wall, like a stricken animal who hides from its kind and will not make so much as a moan. Nothing on earth would have made Nanny do it—so long as there was fighting against odds and work to be done, she would have kept on, till she died, fighting and working. Women—good women, even of the same household—are very differently constituted.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOING BACK TO FOXCHESTER.

IT was better that the family should go at once, Nanny agreed with her father, and that there should be no time left for leave-takings either of place or people. Lady Gosforth had started, immediately after the garden-party at Briarley, on a visit of congratulation to her fortunate nephew who was in Paris. The Wentworths and the most friendly of the acquaintances, whom the Newtons had made since they came to Newton-Hayes, had not recovered sufficiently from the shock of the discovery, that the neighbourhood had "left cards" on the wrong people, since Harry Newton was declared not to be the rightful owner of the late Mr. Jasper Newton's house and lands. Besides, to do the county justice, hardly anybody had the least notion that the father and daughters were to leave so soon.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the red-faced

squire when the date of their departure came to his ears, "it looks like bolting, and, though I always thought the old man a muff, I understand it was his misfortune, not his fault. Why don't Westmacott put a stop to it? The new fellow must be a sorry sort to drive out his own, with a run, in this fashion."

Nanny guessed what they had escaped when the vicar took the victims by surprise, wrung the hand of each in turn and talked in a lowered voice of the mysterious ways of Providence. Nobody doubted the good man's sincerity and nobody disagreed with him, and yet it was painful to discuss these mysterious ways with an excellent soul whose course, however hampered and burdened, was at least plain-sailing, with bread provided and water made sure, for him and his, with the blessing of Heaven on his mild drudgery and worst difficulties.

Nevertheless, Nanny had to undergo a more trying encounter with an intruder on her crowd of engagements. She was told, in the middle of her packing, that a gentleman wished particularly to see her. She guessed, in a moment, from the constrained tone and conscious look of the servant who had delivered the message, that the gentleman was the man who was the centre of curiosity, to great and small in these days. She

had not bidden the servants say beforehand that she was engaged, and she could see no alternative to running down, in one of the calico wrappers, which she had been accustomed to wear in the mornings at Foxchester. She had deliberately resumed it for the work she had in hand, in which she would not have a maid to help her. What was she going to do with a maid? Her day, and Nell's, for such services from maids was over. She would grant the interview which was sought for, in the guise which was not unbefitting her present fortunes, and she would not think twice over it. She had been called upon to do harder things lately, than to receive and dismiss even this particular visitor.

There, in the middle of the drawing-room, stood the brick-red man, the Colonist, whom she and Nell had entertained only a few nights ago. Nanny and Miles Newton had not met in the interval, for there had literally been no time for the attempting of further advances by the winner, or for their rejection by the losers. It was for him to entertain them now if he would, since the room was no longer theirs but his, while it was unchanged in its pleasant picturesqueness, which had grown so homelike. Not an article was displaced, except some of the girls' private property, which Nanny herself did not miss in

the excitement of the moment. It would have required a practised eye to detect that the arrangement of the plumes of lilac and trails of laburnum, the branches of may and honeysuckle, the first roses, the green-house ferns, arum lilies, tuberoses and azaleas which had been sent in, according to rule, by the gardener, had not been Nell's cherished work as on former occasions, but had been undertaken, with considerable searchings of heart, by no less a person than Braintree, with the assistance of a parlour-maid.

Miles Newton looked straight in the eyes of Harry Newton's daughter, as he had looked the only time he had seen her before. If there came into his eyes an expression of unbounded respect and lively admiration for the simple little figure, freed from all encumbrances of falling lace or entangling embroidery, stripped of every adjunct of ring and bracelet, with the beautiful clear-cut face having the hair drawn back and twisted round in the quickest, easiest fashion, he was so bent on his errand that he was not conscious of what his eyes expressed, so that he might have banished the look from them as supererogatory to the business on which he had come, and possibly a liberty under the circumstances.

"I have had to ask to see you, Miss Newton," he explained, after the first formal, slightly awkward

greeting. "Your father regrets he is engaged every time I call, and if I catch such a glimpse of him outside, as I have watched and waited for, he walks away from me so determinedly that, upon my word, I do not feel warranted in following him."

Nanny could not refrain a faint smile at the picture, but she waited to hear something further before she spoke.

"He does the same to Westmacott, who has been here several times—both on his own account and on mine. He—your father—says he has had his say, and does not wish any further discussion of the subject, whatever remains to be settled can be done better by writing. It is ridiculous and absurd of him," represented Miles Newton, vehemently for a man of his years, accustomed to command himself, "to go away, carrying you and your sister with him, in this red-hot haste. Of course, I never, for a single instant, contemplated any move of this kind. Where is the good of our being cousins and having come to an amicable understanding, if he is to go on in this outrageous manner? Further arrangements ought to have been made, before any step of the kind was taken by him."

"It is for my father to decide—you will allow that, Mr. Newton," she said quietly, "and it is

not for me to interfere—you must know that also.”

“I admit nothing,” he cried, in his tumult of feeling, “I knew far less than I ought to have known, though, no doubt, that was my own fault, for which I shall never cease to reproach myself. I took things for granted which I ought to have inquired into. Miss Newton, you will believe me that I had no conception of what had been the state of your father’s affairs, before he succeeded to this unlucky bone of contention, when I came to England. We, at Brisbane—my mother, my stepfather and I—had heard that old John Newton of Red Rock Falls had got on in the world, till he was, as we imagined, rolling in riches. We were aware that he had met with reverses later in his life, but we had no suspicion that the crash was so complete, that no fragment of his great fortune remained for his son. Apart from that mistake, so long an interval had elapsed that Harry Newton might have acquired half a dozen competences to fall back upon.”

Nanny could have smiled again. There spoke the successful man of the great Colony, who could, without question, have exercised his vigorous alert faculties, turned the clever hand of a born mechanic, as well as of a pioneer and traveller, to

whatever it found to do, and heaped up, with comparatively little effort, affluence and wealth without stint, if he had not chosen, by preference, to be the first to lay down tracks in the wilderness, and to carry, to her utmost bounds, the iron rails of the Australian world.

Nanny was chiefly anxious to correct an error, into which her companion might have fallen. "My father was not a money-making man," she explained on her part, "but he maintained his family in independence and comfort, and will maintain them again—that is, if we will let him," she finished, with an unconscious shade of hauteur and an intrepidity which were not lost on the listener.

"From the moment that Westmacott enlightened me," Miles Newton struggled to tell his tale and get his way, "I was prepared, and would have been only too glad to do what I was bound, in common justice, to do, to make Harry Newton an allowance. I am going back, presently, to Australia, to wind up my business over there. I may be absent for years, I may never return to England, I cannot say. I have not any great inclination to come back, after the mischief I have contrived to do in a remarkably short time, when all the while I meant to be reasonable and friendly," he said ruefully. "What,

in the name of common sense and sober reason, was there to keep you—your father, I mean—from coming to terms with me, and consenting to stay on, in my absence, at Newton-Hayes—which has been your home for a year—keeping up the place, instead of leaving the old house to get desolate?”

“There was everything to prevent it,” said Nanny, with decision. “Everything which means, to us, independence and self-respect; we could not consent to be what would be, in effect, your pensioners, after my father had been master here. Perhaps you are judging by a different standard, perhaps it is different in Australia, where, I believe, there is still a primitive condition of things in many places. No, I cannot help you, sir.” She shook her head and smiled again slightly. “You cannot both keep your cake and eat it. You have established your claim to Newton-Hayes. It is a perfectly just and good claim, so that my father has not disputed it; you must be content with that and with our not contesting it. You must not mind turning us out. It may hurt you a little, though, I assure you, it need not, but, you see, you cannot have everything.”

There might be a spice of malice in her words, for men and women—especially high-

spirited men and women—are apt to wreck their barks on the rock of what is called “proper pride,” still, she intended to take leave of him in the most charitable spirit. She was holding out her hand, to bid him good-bye, in a far more friendly fashion than that in which she had made his acquaintance, when she caught a fuller view of his vexed, mortified face, and repented even of the spice of malice in which she had indulged.

“Indeed it is for the best,” she said, earnestly and gently, “as I am quite sure you have meant and done everything for the best all along. I shall tell my father what you have said when he can hear and appreciate it, when this terrible ordeal—I don’t deny it is terrible—is past. He is the last man to bear a grudge; and I should like to say from myself, that we cannot take an allowance from you, or anybody, because we can work for our living. It is not because we despise it, as coming from you—our cousin—but because, really and truly, we do not require it, and are better without it. You must forgive our pride—if it is pride—and not think us ungrateful. I speak in my father’s and sister’s names no less than in my own when I say—and they are not mere words of ceremony—you have our very best wishes.”

Nanny was thankful when the interview was

over, thankful also that she had seen Miles Newton again and heard his assertion of ignorance to begin with, and ultimate dismay and contrition. She could continue to think of him as she had first thought, as a man open like the day, a diligent, unselfish man by nature and grace, a helper of his fellows.

There was another trifling interruption, worrying when it occurred, but which could afterwards be recalled with pleasure.

When the Newtons had started on their journey, and had gone as far as the larger station at Atherney, they found the lower portion occupied by a group of the county gentlemen around, who had been attending quarter sessions. The gentlemen had been, as a matter of course, discussing the strange and lamentable story of the mistake in the succession to Newton-Hayes. They had been commenting freely, in addition, on the manner in which the ex-squire appeared to them to have at once renounced the contest. With the inconsistency of human nature, Harry's former critics took to applauding the action. "The poor fellow has given no trouble he could help, behaved like a gentleman after all, though he was a duffer with regard to riding to hounds and sport in general."

The speaker proceeded to say, hotly, that he

did not think they—the county—would find themselves better off in Mr. Harry Newton's successor, "The lawful heir, or whatever the legal phrase was, Mr. Miles Newton."

"Oh! come now, Squire," remonstrated a younger, more liberal man, "I've nothing to say against the old fellow, I always rather liked him and thought you were inclined to be hard upon him. But the new man is something very different, a long way beyond him. He is reported to be a distinguished engineer, one of the most adventurous and indefatigable travellers who has opened up the length and breadth of his huge island. His name will not be forgotten in its history, as a developer of its resources. It will be a feather in our cap to have him one of us. We made much of the Judge"—referring to a local notability—"when he bought his country-house down here, but his fame has not extended half so far, and is not likely to last nearly as long, as that of Mr. Miles Newton."

The bull-headed squire muttered something of people who did not know when they were well off, of the county's having been very well as it was, and of his private aversion to interlopers, whether they were lawyers or globe-trotters, who meddled with what did not concern them. He then went on to state, with the greatest candour,

that he had been introduced to the new man, in Westmacott's office, and had entered into conversation with him, desiring to be civil and to ascertain what he was like. All the thanks he got was, that the fellow did not hesitate to say the line of railway, on which they were at that moment, ought to have taken another curve, which would have carried it close to the speaker's park-wall, as had been planned in the parliamentary bill—against which he had set his face. When this was pointed out to the new-comer, he had the coolness to assert that personal interests ought to give way to public convenience. He had taken it upon him, afterwards, to say that the scale of wages—which he was discussing with Westmacott—was too low to support the labourer, while the rents were too high, and the leases too short, to give fair play to the farmer. It was "the cow and the three acres" business. They were all tolerably familiar with such rot spoken by stump-orators on radical platforms. This was a meddling, levelling democrat who would make mischief all round. At least, the poor fellow, who was going, had not interfered with his neighbours, nor proposed to make fiddle-strings of what better men than he knew, by the experience of generations, was the right order of things. Ah! there he was with his pretty daughters, poor

things! at the other end of the platform, preparing to take their departure. Hang it! he could not let them go without expressing his regret.

The train was not only due, it was in sight, when the autocratic old squire stumped up, followed by one or two gentlemen lagging behind him, feeling the full awkwardness of the situation, yet fain to show their sympathy.

"So sorry you are going, sir," cried the leader, in a voice hoarse with calling to his dogs for the matter of half a century, but full of cordiality for the occasion, "sorry to have seen so little of you while you were here, but dear! dear! who would have thought you'd have gone so soon? Here to-day and gone to-morrow, it is the way of the world, the lot of humanity. Mrs. Stacey," (naming his wife) "would have gone over and offered to do what she could for the young ladies, bidden them good-bye if nothing else, but we only heard you were leaving at once, late last night. The next time you are in the neighbourhood you must allow us to put you up at the Beeches."

The roar of the train drowned the rest of his words, and Harry could only bow his acknowledgment; but the last Nanny saw of the group was the bluff squire standing, bare headed, looking after them and waving the hat he held in

his hand, while his friends in the rear raised their hats in unison.

She was glad of the little demonstration, she believed it was sincere for the moment. Somehow, its kindly regret touched and softened her. She felt if she had known those people better and dwelt among them, they might have been her friends; that, even knowing the little they did—they of her and she of them—some of the ladies would have followed the example of the gentlemen, if it had been in their power. She recalled the fact that not only Mr. Westmacott but Mrs. Williams in her fussy, and Braintree in his solemn, way, with more than one of the younger servants, had looked honestly sorry to see the family go. It gave her a more wholesome, candid, tolerant feeling towards those she left behind, towards everybody. It furnished her with greater hope and heart in anticipation of the reception of the family, shorn of their glories, at Foxchester.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NATIVES, LADY GOSFORTH AND CAPTAIN PERRY.

THE natives of Foxchester behaved uncommonly well under the circumstances. Nanny went so far as to declare the townspeople made her think better of her kind. The good behaviour was by no means confined to the old doctor or the vicar's niece, or the three old ladies who had been kind to her mother. The Coxes, Prings and Coppocks outdid themselves.

"Glad to have you here again, old man, we'll do our best to make up to you for the loss of the big-wigs you've left behind you—had enough of them, I daresay, eh?" was the roughly jocular, well-meaning greeting of some of Harry's former cronies.

"Oh, Nell, we're charmed to welcome you back," cried the Coxe and Pring girls, "we have missed you so, we want you and your sister for


a pic-nic to Nine-Elms while some of Bertie's friends are with us. Yes, Nell, and there is to be a fête at the opening of the public park, which, you remember, old Mr. Willis has presented to the town. We are going to be quite gay this summer, and we are so pleased that you should come in for a share of the gaiety. Our tennis practisings fell flat without you."

Mrs. Coxe and Mrs. Pring even renewed their invitations to the Newton family, to take up their quarters at one or other of the two houses, till the party could recover from recent worry and fatigue, and look about for the furnished apartments, which must satisfy them in lieu of their old house.

Nanny could not tell whether an aroma of superior gentility still hung about the dispossessed squire of Newton-Hayes and his daughters, or whether Foxchester was really touched and flattered by their choice of a refuge. She felt she ought not to pick motives to pieces, but to be thankful for the friendly feeling shown. No doubt it is easier for poor human nature to weep with those who weep, than to rejoice with those who rejoice, but there was something more in the generous trait than could be thus accounted for. Harry Newton and his daughter Nell had always been popular, after a fashion, and they had borne

their honours so meekly that it would have been difficult for even the hardest nature in the town to rejoice over their downfall. "Little Miss Newton" had held herself aloof, no doubt, but she had not waited for a fortune to do that, and Foxchester could afford to be magnanimous and to treat her well also.

Nanny felt it was like having coals of fire heaped on her head. She knew the sympathy and consideration—which were not always delicately expressed but which were genuine—were called forth by exceptional circumstances, were not likely to survive the first blush of the situation, and could not be expected to last, at their present high level, for any length of time. But she was ready to own it was pleasant to discover there was so much more heart in the world than she had given it credit for. It was small and mean of her to have been so sceptical. Poor Nell had been wiser and nearer the truth in her faith and trust, and Nell was an optimist, to this day, in spite of what had befallen her, yet she looked so ill, though she made no complaint, that Nanny's heart bled to see her. As for Harry, in spite of what was left to him of his old philosophy, he fretted over his younger daughter in a manner which recalled to Nanny, with the sickness of a new apprehension added to her other anxieties,



ill-omened facts in the past. The girls' mother had faded out of existence while yet a young woman, all her sisters had pined and passed away, in succession, under the same scourge of consumption. Nell declared nothing ailed her, and made the bravest efforts to be cheerful by day, and to conceal, from Nanny, her wakeful, restless nights, when the young heart rebelled against its fate.

Ethel Pring or Milly Coxe would contrive to get Nanny aside, and ask her wonderingly and inquisitively if Nell had gone through an illness, during the year she was absent from Foxchester; she was so changed, she looked ever so much older, she was not the same girl she had been when she left. Old-fashioned people shook their heads and whispered mysteriously, as Nanny suspected, that "Miss Nell Newton, for all her prettiness and pleasantness, had clearly had 'a disappointment' on her own account, something quite apart from her father's loss of his estate." The gossips knew it by incontestable signs, familiar to the initiated, and, as Nell had evidently inherited her mother's constitution, there was no answering for the consequences.

Yes, Harry had reason for the distress he was unable to conceal, and Nanny knew he had reason, only she dared not measure the extent of

the mischief, nor speculate what seeds of premature decline the mother's constitution had sown in that of the daughter. Nanny, in spite of her ability and energy, could do no more than Nell herself could have done in the position—trust in Providence, in the healing processes of time, in absence and oblivion, and in the strong religious principles and warm family affections which would balance, in Nell, a disastrous absorption in her sweet fleeting love dream. But if it had been Nanny, who was "the woman forsaken", she would have held up her head, set her teeth, and dismissed the unworthy man from her thoughts, however much she had suffered in the process.

Nanny was grateful for having been let down to a lower social platform with comparative ease. Mr. Coxe had taken Harry back into his office on the old terms. The negotiations which had to do with Nanny herself getting a post in the High School were not only pending, they were drawing to a successful conclusion.

If Nanny was in trepidation on Nell's behalf, she was delivered from the fears for her father, which used to haunt and abash her. Harry had come out of the furnace a sadder and a wiser man. Generally, when a man stumbles on the brink of perdition and is only saved by the skin of his teeth, he is, if there is any good in him,

softened towards his fellow-men. He has a livelier comprehension of their dangers and temptations, he is gentler in his judgments on their failures. Harry's narrow escape had the reverse effect on him. It hardened him in the sense in which a good soldier is hardened. It gave him a keener insight into what easy-going humble and tolerant good-nature might lead to. He saw, at last, that every man's path is encompassed with stumbling-blocks and pitfalls, and that, if he is to come out of them with honour in the day of account, and not to lend his neighbour a push in the wrong direction, he must walk warily himself and do his best to induce his neighbour to follow the example of all responsible, upright men. Harry might not be quite as complacent and agreeable a companion, as he was formerly, to Mr. Pring and Mayor Coppock, but he was a truer friend on those occasions when he turned his back upon them.

The old house in Paradise Row had, as it happened, stood unlet while the Newtons were reigning at Newton-Hayes, but it was not possible for them to re-occupy it, at once, much as Harry desired it. Their old furniture was gone. Mr. Westmacott, indeed, had forced upon Harry a small addition to his earlier loan, in order to meet the family "wants" at the crisis, and till

the head was again earning an income. But that debt had to be paid back, with the others which had been incurred, and the nearest the Newtons could approach to their former home was to engage lodgings in another house in Paradise Row. From the most available of the windows of this much shabbier and barer version of the old dwelling-place, Harry was in the habit of peering over into what had been his garden, which was at present lying fallow. He would try to ascertain what plants had survived the year's abandonment to neglect, and protest that he would sooner go to the owner of the house and offer to prune the wall-trees and standards as a labour of love, than see them go to rack and ruin before his eyes, while the place awaited a new tenant.

Nanny resumed her old, half-German practice of marketing before breakfast. As she plodded to and fro, in the cool uncrowded streets, she would ask herself whether her going away and coming back had not been the shifting scenes of a dream—if she could have had, only the other day, a housekeeper to receive her orders, a solemn Braintree to remind Nanny of her duties, a train of servants at her bidding, a carriage like Cinderella's to ride in? Ah! the fairy godmother had withdrawn her support, or was it that Nanny

had failed in some of the conditions of her higher estate and so forfeited her inheritance?

One morning Nanny had been walking hastily, in order to get out of the "tail" of a shower, she had opened the house-door by means of the latch-key, with which her landlady had entrusted her, and was delaying for a moment in the small hall, for the purpose of depositing her dripping umbrella in the stand, when she noticed a travelling cap, lying beside Harry's soft felt hat, on the hall-table. The Newtons were the only lodgers in the house, and the landlady was a widow, with no male encumbrance who would wear a travelling cap. But Nanny was too damp and limp, in her cotton skirt, to solve the mystery in the simplest manner, by walking into the sole sitting-room which Harry could afford; she had also the breakfast-hour on her conscience, to hurry her in changing her dress.

She had scarcely thrown off her hat, when Nell came flying upstairs to speak to her. Nell? Could this be Nell, the wan and languid Nell of the last few weeks? She was transformed as if by magic, she was blooming and radiant as ever. She made no prelude, no disguise. She called out, with her whole heart in her voice:

"He has come, Nanny, at last," she stopped

with a gasp of delight, like a child. "He has travelled all night, he was so anxious to be here. It was not his fault. His father did not tell him, while he was still detained by regimental business, and greatly puzzled by not hearing anything of us. It was Lady Gosforth who wrote to him—no, not from Paris, she has come back to London, where she has been laid up with lumbago. Then, when he would have started or written immediately, after hearing what she had to tell him, she prevented him till she could communicate with his father. He has had to go down to Briarley, and there have been endless delays. But, indeed, indeed, it was not his fault, never. He did care for me, Nanny, he would not give me up. Of course I know it cannot be, I cannot be the cause of his making such a sacrifice. Oh! yes, his father is right, so far, Captain Perry must redeem Briarley. The old name cannot be allowed to die out. Oh! I know all that, but I don't seem to mind it just now, since he has come and it is not his fault, and he has always cared for me as—as I thought, a thousand times more than I deserved."

"Nonsense, Nell," cried Nanny, "but I am as happy as you are—very nearly—that he has cleared himself, since I had brought myself to the point of admitting that—if ever I were to

have a brother—I might endure him sooner than most men. With regard to its being impossible that you two should marry, well! if he does not care for you more than for the family acres—though the Savilles may have had them and made ducks and drakes of them since the Conquest—then so far from your not deserving him, it is all the other way, and he is not worthy of you, dear, not for a single moment. I have read a great deal, in a certain class of novels, of men being bound to trample down the best feelings of their own and of somebody else's nature, for the sake of preserving a wretched stake in a county, which, between you and me, would often be a great deal better without them. I have heard the same doctrine spouted occasionally, of late, in real life, but I never could find that any good, not to say great, man had subscribed to it. I never believed one word of it, any more than I believed the talk of living being necessarily so expensive a process nowadays, and of its being incumbent on people to live up to the standard of their generation. The argument goes on to bring forward a catalogue of the woes of clergymen and officers who can no longer live on their tithes and their pay, but must sell their souls for money, or emigrate and hide their heads in the wilds. My dear Nell, think of the good

clergymen and the gallant officers who were quite contented and thought themselves and their families well off—at times, too, when provisions and wearing apparel were far more expensive—on incomes which their grandsons and granddaughters despise, and wring their hands over. Has nobody the courage to make a stand against luxury and self-indulgence? Why can't the grandsons and granddaughters—especially when they are young, strong and fond of each other, like you and Captain Perry—think and act for themselves? What is there to hinder you and your young man from waiting till he can save a little money? If he can't save it, the more shame to him. I should not have a word to say to him in that case, if I were you. It is ill counting on dead men's shoes, but I may say this, his father must die some day, and then the entail can be farther broken, and the poor, drained, stripped, swamped estate sold for what it is worth, or put out to nurse, if anybody will undertake the arduous task, till it recover from its long sickness. There, Nell, do you think me a hard-hearted monster? Anyhow, I'm 'fixed', as the Americans say. I have fastened my last hook and tied my last string, I'm going down to welcome Captain Perry and to back him; for I have sufficient faith in him to believe that he has come on an honest

man's, and not on a worldly-minded coward's, errand."

Captain Perry was neither worldly-minded nor a coward, though he had been hard put to it. He would have waited for his Nell till their heads were gray. He would have consented to go into "a two pair back" with her, like the most simple-minded and fearless of the officers of the past, to whom Nanny had referred, who did not dream that the plainest lodging and the homeliest fare could detract from his claims as an officer and a gentleman. He might be so sophisticated as not to like roughing it, and knocking about at home, in a manner of which he would have thought nothing if the object had been sport, or the locality the ends of the earth; but he would have done it, and the vindication of his manliness, together with the possession of Nell, who would have cheerfully shared every act of self-denial, would have been his "exceeding great reward."

But Lady Gosforth interposed, she prevented the holocaust, such as it would have been, and the bitter struggle with Mr. Peregrine Saville. She was persuaded that she had taken an active part in promoting an alliance between the Newton and Saville families, when it had seemed a much more likely and desirable step. Her prejudices

were with the class to which she belonged, and with the privileges to which they clung; but she could not consent to be concerned in breaking an innocent girl's heart, the daughter of her old friend, her poor Tom's old friend—Harry Newton—and that in the hour of his second experience of adversity. She could not have anything to do with a young man's covering himself with disgrace. For, however his world might slur over his withdrawal, there would be very real disgrace in Captain Perry's renouncing his suit to Nell Newton after he had gone so far as he had gone, because of her father's misfortunes. Even the arch-Mephistopheles—Mr. Peregrine Saville—was sensible that his very shady reputation would be several shades duskier, after that public demonstration at Briarley which had been followed—not by the announcement of the marriage of Captain Perry to the younger of the Misses Newton, according to what had been long planned and intended—but by the sneaking retreat of the intended bridegroom, consequent on the prospective bride's loss of fortune.

Thus, when Lady Gosforth—believing that both Harry and Nanny would fully endorse the propriety of the selection of Nell, as the chief recipient of her bounty—proceeded to make known the sum to her credit in her bank-book, in ad-

dition to her flourishing investments, and that she was prepared to settle a handsome portion on the one of her favourites who, in her estimation, needed it most, Mr. Peregrine Saville, having a mature acquaintance with the Quixotic and Puritanical peculiarities of the son with whom he had to do, gave way after a brief resistance. He masked a wry face under a sneering smile, and neither did his reward fail him. He was on the eve of claiming the gentlest, most charitable and long-suffering of fair and fairly-endowed daughters-in-law, with whom an unworthy elderly gentleman was ever blest.

Nell could not do less, to show her affectionate gratitude to Lady Gosforth, than comply with her ladyship's request for a long visit on Nell's part, during which the trousseau might be bought, and the preliminaries of the marriage settled.

Harry and Nanny were more than pleased that their darling should go out from them in the glad, natural way originally anticipated.

Thus it dawned upon the slow comprehension of Foxchester that the Newtons were not such an unlucky family as had been confidently asserted, when they returned like bad halfpence from their fleeting enjoyment of Newton-Hayes. There was a certain glory reflected on the town and its daughters, by one of them being about

to marry the member of an old county family, the son and heir of a squire, an officer in what the Pring girls were ready to warrant, was a fashionable regiment. Nell Newton had not done so badly with her beauty, for the credit of Foxchester, as had been feared.

It required some magnanimity in the gossips, led by Milly and Letty Coxe, to forgive the misadventure of Lady Gosforth's choosing to be in town out of season, and of Nell's company being wanted there, which made Foxchester lose the very pretty and improving spectacle of Captain Perry's courtship, culminating in the gala of a marriage. But to even this call on its forbearance Foxchester was equal.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VISITOR.

THE drama had not gone so far as Nell's marriage, not even so far as her returning—as she insisted on doing—to bid farewell to Foxchester before the ceremony, which was to be celebrated in Lady Gosforth's Parish Church from Lady Gosforth's house, to which Harry and Nanny were to go as valued guests. Nell had been brought to see that this was best, as Harry and Nanny had never doubted, for the marriage of a Saville of Briarley,—however much the family had fallen—from furnished apartments in Paradise Row, Foxchester, was, to say the least, undesirable.

In the meantime, both Harry Newton and his elder daughter were suffering from inevitable reaction—reaction in a double sense. In the first place they were paying the penalty of the strain, to which they had been subjected on quitting

Newton-Hayes; in the second place they were condemned to look at the other side of what had been their joy and relief in learning that Nell was not to be the principal sufferer from the calamity which had befallen her father. Nell's great promotion in being, as the townspeople put it, "adopted by Lady Gosforth", as well as engaged to Captain Saville, had prolonged the interest felt in the Newtons' reverse of fortunes, and continued to cast, even in the family's eyes, a glamour over the growing prosaicness of the situation, in reference to Harry and Nanny. It was from internal not external causes, that a certain sinking of heart beset the father and daughter—especially the daughter. Nanny was indignant with herself, and found the only consolation for her weakness in the determination that she would overcome it presently. Everything was so much better than she had dared to hope, so little permanent harm had been done by the sudden rising and equally sudden falling of fortune's scales. She and her father were in a very similar position to that they had originally occupied, and added to it was the great gain of Nell's assured happiness. It would be unpardonable in Nanny not to be devoutly thankful that matters were not worse. But was the position the same? Nanny and Nell had hardly ever

been separated in their lives before, and now not only was Nell gone on a long visit, she was going, for all the years to come, in a parting which was only second to that of death. Nanny trusted the pair would have many happy meetings in the future, but it would no longer be a case of next neighbours at Newton-Hayes and Briarley; the sisters would not be together again, would no more be one in heart and interest, as in the past. In fact, Nell was drawn back into the sphere out of which her father and sister had passed. Nanny had sufficient confidence in Captain Perry's kindness of heart and affection for the woman he was about to make his wife, to feel certain that he would not seek to make this fact an obstacle to her periodical intercourse with her family. Nevertheless, the fact remained, and Nanny's common sense told her that this barrier—raised by different circles, different habits and tones of thought and feeling—however much family affection might strive against it, would rather increase than decrease with years.

Is it possible for an experience to be repeated with identical results? We go on some expedition from which we derive much pleasure, and we determine to go again to the same locality, in the same company, when we find the spell

broken, we see the surroundings with other eyes, our friends fail to fulfil our expectations and we fail to fulfil theirs. The whole thing is a disappointment and a failure. It is all the worse because we recall, in a baffled spirit, our first favourable impression of the experiment, and are mortified to discover that we have been mistaken, or that we have grown fickle in our tastes—hence the collapse of a cherished scheme which we took pains to realize.

In some of the Newtons' difficulties at Newton-Hayes, both father and daughters had looked back on Foxchester and their life there, not without tender regret. Harry had been like a fish out of the water, for a time, without his regular office-work—now, when he had resumed it, he complained he could not get back into the swim, he had lost touch with his work. He had no heart nor spirit for its drudgery. He drooped in the hot summer weather, as he had not drooped in his earlier reverses. He was an older man, in spite of what was perennially youthful in him, much of the elasticity of his nature was gone. He had missed his garden which he had worked with his own hands, no gardens half a dozen times larger and finer, worked by his gardeners, without any trouble or labour on his part, had been able to make up to him for the deprivation.

He had not yet been reinstated in his Paradise Row garden, but even if he and Nanny saved money enough to rent and re-furnish the old house, she had a melancholy foreboding that it would never again be as it had been. It would not be like the house to which Harry had brought home his young wife, in which Nanny and Nell had been born, in whose holes and corners they had played many a merry game. Nanny doubted very much whether Harry would resume his gardening with even a shred of his former zest; she could fancy him hiring a jobbing gardener to do the work, while Harry looked on, with his hands in his pockets, hardly exerting himself to call his subordinate to order, or to correct him when he was about to commit a fatal blunder.

The gloss was off everything, even off the former life at Foxchester of which the recollection had lingered in their memories. There was no longing to take up afresh the real business, with its petty worries and pinching cares, and to abide by it.

Nanny's personal plans were overturned by Nell's approaching marriage. They had not been very brilliant plans, nor had they been inordinately dear to her. She was not a born teacher, with a burning desire to impart knowledge at

first hand. She would have preferred to cultivate such gifts as she had, while she was still in the heyday of youth, trusting to communicate, what was good in them, in an indirect fashion to her neighbours. Still, she had clung to the independent and equal companionship, the intellectual stimulus of a High School. It was equivalent to out-of-doors interests and a welcome variety in the monotony of her daily routine. But Nell's marriage put an end to all this. It was not to be thought of, that Harry should not have the undivided care and attention of one of his daughters, and be left when he had leisure, or was ailing, to the tender mercies of a landlady. The idea of the post in the High School had to be given up. Nanny must content herself with "the common round, the daily task" of the home duties, which she was clearly called upon to discharge. It really did not matter that they were rendered only the more irksome to a creature of a highly-strung temperament and of inexhaustible energy, because of the enforced idleness of life in "apartments", as contrasted with life in a house of which the candidate for occupation is the mistress; on the management and embellishment of which she may—however poor in other resources—bestow, to her benefit, some of her superabundant mental ardour, until she end by

acquiring her share of the true house-mother's beneficence and content.

The weather had the sultry oppressiveness of a hot August (Nell was to be married long after the close of the season). The rooms in the lodging in Paradise Row were close and stuffy. The landlady, a worthy enough representative of her class, who had generally a great respect for "little Miss Newton" as was a young lady as knew her own mind, and did her part without troubling other folks more than she could help, and without putting them out by shilly-shallying," was affected by the state of the thermometer, or by private cares, irrespective of the fact that the Newtons paid "like clock-work," for she had been cross all the morning. It was Foxchester market-day and Harry would be detained longer than usual at the office, so that Nanny could not count on his company till late in the afternoon. She would have been almost glad to have called on the Coxes or the Prings as a relief from her own undiluted company, and for a change, but everybody who could get out of Foxchester at this season was at the sea-side or paying visits. Nanny could only put on her hat and saunter along the shady sides of the quiet streets, for air and refreshment. Suddenly, somebody coming along in the opposite direction and choosing the

sunny side—as if English sunshine was a matter of preference, or of utter indifference to the pedestrian—caught her eye. For it was somebody whose figure stood out, unmistakably, from the figures of the farmers and townspeople standing about in half drowsy confabulation. Yet it was a figure which, in its very strangeness, had a curious significance and familiarity for Nanny. The slightly slouching, but easy and alert gait was conspicuous among the lagging steps and weary attitudes which prevailed around. This was the distinguishing attribute of a recent acquaintance, made in too striking circumstances to be easily forgotten. The face, with its brick-red complexion, told the same tale, and she would have known the quick interested glance, which took in everything and disdained nothing, among a thousand.

There was a flash of recognition, which was not without pleasure, on her side, as he sprang with the lightness of foot of a man twenty years his junior, across the street and held out his hand. "Miss Newton, I am very glad to have met you," he said. They were everyday, easily-said words, but they had a depth of sincerity in their ring, which does not often accompany them.

Nanny was bitterly ashamed of herself, she could have punished herself by every conceivable

penance a moment afterwards. For the sight of him brought Newton-Hayes vividly before her, the green park with its spreading trees, the pretty spacious old drawing-room, of which Nell and she had been so proud to be the mistresses, and, before she could keep them back, the tears sprang to her eyes. What would he think of her? What would he believe was the origin of the tears held back with the greatest difficulty? He saw them, as he saw everything, and he did not seek to hide from her that he saw them. He was not accustomed to hide what he saw. In all his busy, honourable career he had never had anything to conceal. He would have spared, as far as he could, the feelings of anybody with whom he had to do, but, naturally, it was difficult for him to keep to himself what he was swift to observe. His own frank, honest face, with its buoyant intelligence, fell—more even than Nanny had seen it fall, when she told him that her father could not accept concessions from him, and that they were better left to themselves. “Have I made another blunder in coming here?” he asked, in his point-blank fashion, while he showed manifest anxiety with regard to her answer. “I thought I might. I could not sail for Australia without making an attempt to see you all again. We are cousins, you know. I have been trying

to find out what has become of my mother's family, and it seems the members, who were left, went to America twenty years ago. My mother had no children by her second marriage, and your father is the nearest relative I have—to my knowledge."

She had not thought of this, but the information was not wanted to soften her. "No, no, it was not a blunder," she told him quickly, "it was kind of you to think of us in that light. My father will be pleased to see you, as I am. Come home with me and wait till he returns from his office."

He took her at her word, without a moment's hesitation, walking along by her side with evident satisfaction.

Nanny thought she could count on her father, she believed it would be a different thing for him to receive and entertain Miles Newton at Foxchester. It would be something apart from acknowledging and leaving him master of Newton-Hayes. She could depend on the claims of kindred—which the winner in the brief passage-at-arms was urging—and on the obligations of hospitality having their due weight with Harry in Foxchester, after the interval which had elapsed.

When Nanny and her father's cousin arrived at Paradise Row, she found the entrance to the house, for which they were bound, encumbered

by a huge hamper, over which the landlady, with restored good humour, was fussing.

"Look here, Miss Newton," said the good woman, "this here hamper is for you, leastways, it is addressed to your pa, and as it is marked 'perishable' it is bound to hold fruit or vegetables or dairy produce, so I was just awaiting your permission to open it, and put the contents in the cellar or the larder."

The bright beseeching eyes of the donor of the hamper were again fixed on Nanny, in earnest entreaty and deprecation.

"It is only a sample of the present year's fruit and vegetables—in which Tomkins tells me your father is a regular connoisseur. There are the latest of the strawberries, and the earliest of the apricots and peaches, with the cucumbers and vegetable marrows from his frames, and the asparagus from his pits and such stuff. Oh! and there are some flowers for you and your sister—you always had flowers about, I remember, I take it you are fond of them, perhaps you would like to lift them out for yourself."

Nanny could not do otherwise. "Nell is from home," she said, "therefore you must be content with my thanks for your mindfulness." As she took up the flowers and bent over them to enjoy their beauty and fragrance, again she was

carried back to Newton-Hayes, to its restful peace and bounty, to the refined mellow charm wrought by the culture of generations. She could not help herself, she hailed the sight of each flower as the renewal of a delightful acquaintance. "I know where that passion-flower came from," she said eagerly, "it grows on the warm outer wall of the big conservatory, and these salvias—what glorious blues and scarlets, are from the bed below. The banksian roses climb up the pillars of the small old hot-house. They were a mass of bloom last season."

She would not have believed, if she had been asked the day before, that she had kept in her mind a minutely accurate plan of the place in which she had only dwelt for a year, so as to assign unerringly each flower to its locality.

While she continued to touch the flowers with lingering tenderness, she came upon a mass of carnations and picotees—"Why," she cried, "these are some of the picotees which Tomkins was raising from slips, with the greatest care, to which he pinned his faith as certain to get him the first prize at the Atherney Flower Show;" she looked at Miles Newton speculatively, "did he give them to you? or did you gather them yourself?" she inquired solicitously.

"I gathered them," he answered, readily and impenitently.

"I should not have dared to do it," she told him, with a twinkle in her grave eyes. "You will have a bad quarter of an hour the next time you go into the gardens."

"What were they for if not to be gathered?" he asked naïvely, "and if they were not yours they were mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE ONLY PROPER AND POSSIBLE COMPROMISE."

NANNY was right in her estimate of her father's feelings. Sufficient time had passed for the soreness of defeat to be allayed. He had lost the haunting sense of shame and mortification which had rendered his cousin's presence intolerable to him. After all, Harry had done Miles Newton no wrong, Nanny, and a greater than Nanny, had withheld Harry from a dastardly act, which would have been his own, and not his cousin's, ruin; and he had certainly saved his rival from what—even with the assurance of ultimate victory—must have been the annoyance and delay of a law-suit.

Harry was never the man to bear a grudge long. With his simple confiding nature recovering its balance, under this new aspect of affairs, he felt in a position to be magnanimous. He was proud to show the wondering Foxchester

gossips the terms on which he stood with the cousin who had dispossessed him of his inheritance. The tie by blood, slight as it was, could now make itself be felt. Harry, no longer heavily hampered by opposing forces, could be sufficiently at ease to look, listen, and recall early colonial associations. He could ask innumerable questions about the growth of Australia, and be more and more interested by what he heard in reply. He fell insensibly into addressing his visitor as "Miles," "Old chap," "My boy," as he had heard his—Harry's—father call Miles' father. Harry would tell the present Miles stories he remembered of the elder Miles, his wife and their first-born children—"the jolly little kids" of whom their boy playmate had been fond. The ice of separation, estrangement, and strife was rapidly thawing.

Nanny listened, half wondering, half thankful. She felt inclined to make much, on her own account, of the unexpected pleasure of renewed contact with the rare intelligence, the single-hearted manliness and large-minded unconventional aims of a primitive great man—for that the Australian engineer and pioneer had in him the first elements of greatness, remained her unwavering conviction. It was a treat to hear his animated conversation—all the fresher that it was unvar-

nished—on his travelled experiences. There was no lack of native refinement in the talk, and it is the only refinement which is not skin-deep, the refinement of a thoroughly candid and generous nature, with a dash of heroism in it, and, for a background, the reverence of a man who realized what was great and sublime, because of the absence of littleness and vanity in his own character, and because of his capacity for veneration. Like his capacity for love, it had not been frittered away by perpetual trifling. It had been fostered by lengthened periods of solitary communion with his own spirit, and with the Father and Redeemer of all spirits, in that primitive wilderness which may be savage and desolate, but is never sordid and squalid.

Nanny enjoyed walking about Foxchester and its neighbourhood with a man who condescended to everything and everybody, as if he had never ridden a pilot-engine for more miles than she ventured to sum up; nor laid the foundation of a bridge, whose mighty span and giant supports he devised, and would live to see one of the wonders of the Colonial world; nor dammed the waters in a gully until the arid country beyond—parched and rent with thirst—blossomed like the rose at the stroke of a magician's wand, in the haunts of the lizard and

the snake. He was as much interested as a child would have been in whatever was new to him, or in whatever suggested comparisons and contrasts with institutions familiar to him, in the trade and the traffic, the shops, the dwelling-houses, the people, everything and everybody introduced to his notice. He was a man, who practically did not understand the meaning of the word *blasé*. He called nothing common or unclean; such terms as "snob" and "cad" seldom fell from his lips. If he had dwelt habitually in Melbourne, or in Sydney, or even in Brisbane, he might have had a chance of being as sophisticated as the rest of the world, but he had been almost as much a denizen of the bush as if he had been a native. It was against the rough malpractices of the bush, when it began to have a sprinkling of inhabitants—the roaring camps, the diggers' stations where diggers' law was as yet but partially established, the drinking bars, the betting shanties—that he was chiefly driven to testify with an earnestness, the quiet sobriety of which was more impressive than the fiercest denunciations.

Miles Newton had gone to one of the Foxchester hotels for his fortnight in the town; by the second night Harry had insisted on installing his cousin under the same roof with him, in a

spare bedroom which the landlady kept in reserve to let to a visitor of her "family", in the phrase by which she appropriated Harry and Nanny. The satisfactory point was, as Nanny congratulated herself, that she could have no doubt he was comfortable and happy in his quarters. He could make himself equally at home in a hut or in Government House. Just because he had been accustomed to knock about, as he said, and he had learnt to put no exaggerated value on externals. He was not dependent for his amusement on a billiard-room, nor even on a gun-room, though there had been times when he had been called upon to shoot—both in self-defence and to fill an empty larder. He had liked the library and drawing-room at Newton-Hayes the first time he saw them, and he occasionally referred to them with undiminished pleasure. But he could also appreciate the Paradise Row lodging-house parlour, with the dainty, womanly contrivances by which Nanny strove to soften its bareness and brighten its dinginess.

When Lady Gosforth heard that Miles Newton was paying a voluntary acceptable visit to Harry, she highly approved of the flag of truce, and promptly requested the new Squire of Newton-Hayes to do her "the honour" of accompanying his Foxchester cousins to town and of being present

at Nell's marriage. The invitation was accepted as readily as it was given. Everything seemed to promise the most Christian charity and amity between the kinsmen, in the near prospect of Miles Newton's return to Australia for an indefinite period.

Why then should the recently received relation, whom everybody had accepted as a man and a brother, in addition to his being the rightful heir of Newton-Hayes, take it upon him to disturb the harmony established so lately? He was rash enough to do it, by seizing an opportunity, when he and Nanny were alone together in the parlour, to come up to the chair in which she was sitting by the table, on which her work-basket stood, with a face sufficiently anxious and set in its urgent appeal, to frighten even a courageous woman.

"I wish to make a proposal, Miss Newton—Cousin Nanny," he said with desperate determination, "I do not know what I would not give to have you on my side."

"Oh! don't spoil it all," she cried vehemently, "when you are going away; it cannot be and we are all so happy and friendly as it is. You cannot tell what a consolation it is to have it so, and how glad we—father and I—are to have had the privilege of knowing you, else really you would

not spoil it all by returning to the impossible—well-nigh affronting—idea of offering some wretched compensation or compromise.”

If he had been a sensitive boy or a morbid-minded, thin-skinned man he might have said no more, as it was he was far too strong, simple and frank to be easily turned away from any purpose which was—he honestly believed—for the good of those he cared for most. “You must hear me out, Nanny,” he insisted on his right, and when she could not refuse to listen to him, to her amazement, in place of laying before her a cunningly concocted scheme to make up to Harry—while sparing his pride and independence—for the loss which he had sustained at his cousin’s hands, it was of his own loss that Miles Newton spoke, with his natural eloquence; it was to crave of her bounty to make up to him for the deprivation which threatened him, that he made use of his advantage. “It will all be a failure if you can have nothing to say to me,” he represented emphatically. “I have got the old place it is true, and I should have been glad enough to have it if I had not put you and your father out—I did not take that into consideration as I should have done, nor understand what it meant till I knew you—and now what do I care for the place all to myself when I come

back, if I ever come back, with you and my cousin Harry thrust aside into a little hole of a lodging? Not that it is not nice," he corrected himself, looking round with tenderly approving eyes. "That is the good of being a gentlewoman: somebody once wrote about daisies springing up where the woman he loved set her foot, I daresay you know all about it, for you are clever and well-read, while I have had little time for books except by fits and snatches. I can vouch for this however, that whatever you touch grows nice, homelike and beautiful under your hand. I cannot tell if that is true of all women, I have not known many, but I would not give a straw for the woman of whom it could not be said. You will not abandon me and Newton-Hayes to deterioration, emptiness and ugliness?"

She was so taken aback that she sat and listened to him in total silence, and perhaps it was the first time that Nanny Newton had been subdued and silenced.

He went on in the singleness of his heart—"I'll tell you plainly what I want, Cousin Nanny. Of course I am not worthy of you, I have knocked about and been so desperately busy all my life that I have not acquired much I should have liked to possess. I am not a young man, though I do not think my best days are past,

still I can love you as dearly as a fitter man could love you, and I would do a man's best to make you happy. You and my cousin Harry would not go back to your own house at once, that might be too trying for him, poor fellow! but we should all take the voyage to Australia together, first. He would see the old places he knew as a boy, and likes to hear about to this day, now that his interest in them is revived; it would do him all the good in the world and make him young again. I cannot help thinking you would like it too," ran on the manly wistful voice, "you would breathe the fresh air of the bush and live with only a tent-covering between you and the sky, you would see the blue gums and the grass trees and the great pines we have talked of. When I had put my railway lines into good hands and disposed of my shares, we might, if we cared to, come back and settle down for good, in the house that was our fathers'. Your father would have grown accustomed to the arrangement and have ceased to mind it."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Nanny, looking him full in the face, with her lips parted and her colour coming and going, "are you not cheating me and yourself—only I don't think you could cheat anybody even if you tried—with

some deep-laid scheme of atoning to us for having to give up Newton-Hayes? Are you not speaking out of your pity, which is very good of you, but very maddening to me?"

"Pity!" he exclaimed with such unfeigned surprise that it was wonderfully convincing. "Well, I suppose I have been pitying myself if I got an unfavourable answer, when I might have been better employed; but you won't blame me too severely for that when you have something to do with it?"

"And can you—a man like you—really wish a young woman—quite a foolish ignorant young woman—like me, to share your life, with its wide far-reaching horizon!"

"Do you doubt it?" demanded Miles Newton, still in puzzled bewilderment that anybody—Nanny above all—should suspect him of pretending what he did not feel to the bottom of his heart.

"Then you pay me a great compliment, and I am the proudest and happiest woman in England to have it paid to me," said Nanny straightforwardly, while her eyes began to droop and her cheeks to flush with the very pride and happiness of which she spoke.

He took her in his arms and kissed her like the true and ardent lover he was, as a natural preliminary to telling her: "We'll be married

at the same time and place as your sister and Captain Saville, I can manage it all," declared the man of energy, "I am sure your friends will agree to it, for, look here, my dear, I ought to go back to the Colony by the next Mail but one. If it had not been for you, young lady, I should have been off a month ago, so that the blame will fall on your small shoulders if you keep me dangling here much longer."

The announcement of Miles Newton's wishes, which it seemed were Nanny's wishes also, was a new shock to the man whose consent was asked, but it was an agreeable shock this time, to which he had no difficulty in accommodating himself. In fact, Harry's imagination, which it was not easy to fire, had already been kindled by those traveller's tales bringing back the misty charm of visions he had held.

"When the breeze of a joyous dawn blew free
In the silken sails of infancy."

Harry experienced a kind of home sickness for grape vines and prickly pears, for rolling plains clothed in tufted grass, blazing here and there with gorgeous flowers, on which wild parrots in their brilliant plumage alighted appropriately, over which pattered and tramped such mighty

flocks and herds as made the wealth of the patriarch sheik Abraham.

"I'll go and have a look at Australia again before I die. There is nothing now to hinder me," said Harry exultantly, with a wavering colour rising for a moment in his face. "I'm with you, Miles, my boy, as your father was with mine half a century ago. The position is somewhat reversed, I grant, but what of that? It is not lost that a friend gets and the best man is entitled to win, eh, Nanny? I'll show you Red Rock Falls, and the spot where mother used to go to look out for father coming home at night-fall. I wish we could have had Nell with us to listen to the laughing jackasses and watch the tricks of the honey bears, but we'll bring her such a cage full of cockatoos as the Zoo itself will not be able to match. I declare I have the scent of the yellow wattles in my nostrils already. Yes, Miles, I'm your man, and Nanny here will go with us, as you say, and take care of us."

It was significant, not of Harry alone, but of all who knew Nanny Newton well—the great engineer being no exception—that, the chief idea which the ivory-faced, gray-eyed little woman suggested was that of a domestic queen, a house-mistress and mother, though she might never bear

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children. The first and last thought of her was that of a ministering spirit born to bear and share the burden of humanity. Nanny did not belong to the clinging dependent sisterhood whose abiding notion of womanly triumph and bliss is to be cared for, to be saved trouble and worry, to fascinate universally by the simple exercise of their graces, to be indulged and petted! She was as humble at heart as the best, but she did not desire to remain a child all her life. Nay, even in her childhood she had been a wise helpful little woman. Her province—immeasurably the higher of the two—was to care for others, rather than to be cared for herself, to pet in preference to being petted, and very inspiring petting hers was calculated to be.

As it happened, Nanny and Nell were fated to be next neighbours, but in their affectionate intimacy there was a reserve on the one side unsuspected on the other. The same was true of the close comradeship and tender friendship which existed between Miles Newton and his wife. He never heard from her loyal lips, never guessed by the slightest sign, how near he had been, but for her, to losing his inheritance.

With regard to Harry the paradox was true, that he never really enjoyed the possession of Newton-Hayes till he had resigned it to another man.

When he had no special responsibility and dignity to maintain, the handsome simple-hearted kindly old man was in a position to divide the county's favour with his eminent public-spirited son-in-law.

THE END.

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1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the properties of the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation









